





# Theise Manifesto

Beauty is more important than impact.

Harmony is more important than intensity.

The whole of any wine must always  
be more than the sum of its parts.

Distinctiveness is more important  
than conventional prettiness.

Soul is more important than anything,  
and soul is expressed as a trinity of family,  
soil and artisanality.

Lots of wines, many of them good wines,  
let you taste the noise. But only the best let  
you taste the silence.

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# Introduction

*The “you” I’m addressing is someone I’m presuming to be a wine professional in your 20s to early 30s. Older people, let alone persons of my Punic age, know this stuff already. But you folks have a lot coming at you, so I’m going to grab the salient factors and wedge them into whatever mind-portal I can find.*



Actually most of you have at least some sense of Austria, and though there’s more for you to know, what you do know is accurate. A lot of you have been there, and were surprised. “These people are like Italians except they speak German” would sum it up. Not to mention they all speak English, and though they live in an especially fine beautiful Old-World locale, they themselves feel more modern than the Germans do.

Yet it can seem beautifully strange there. One morning I awoke in my hotel in Rust, a handsome medieval little town in Burgenland, near a big shallow lake with a huge reedy shoreline, full of frogs and other critters that storks like to eat. So there’s a plenitude of storks, on every rooftop it seems, and that morning I was almost eye level with a very glam bird who was tidying the exterior of her nest. It was one of those *It has ever been thus* instants, where you feel the tingle of nature going about its business without concern for your short-ass life. I’d heard the frogs when I turned out my lights the night before,

and now I was spying on a busy stork, and all around me was a mellow antiquity, and man, it was Europe. Yet a few hours later I sat at dinner and ate a meal so modern and ethereal it could have easily been New York or Chicago or San Francisco.

Austria is also simpler than Germany where wine is concerned. There’s no identity crises here, and there’s a whole lot fewer internal contradictions, ideological struggles and multiple identities, all the things that make Germany so, um, entertaining.

So, what must you know?

First, this was only a fitfully quality-oriented wine culture until the mid-80s, hardly known abroad, and barely worth knowing. Too many of the wines were made as cheaper alternatives to sweet German wines, and the whole queasy thing reached its apogee when a scrum of scummy wine merchants were discovered to have used the active ingredient of anti-freeze in their wines, to make them seem richer and sweeter.

This was a blessing in disguise, because it forced the wine culture to reinvent itself, which it did, aggressively and in amazingly short order.

It is now a **dry wine culture**.

It is now overwhelmingly a **small-family estate wine culture**. There are very few negociants left, and the small number of co-ops are among the best of their kind anywhere.

To the extent sweet wines exist, they are almost always **true dessert-wines**.

Austria is quite apart from Germany in meso-climate. It's more easterly and more southerly. It takes you 7-8 hours (if you're lucky with traffic) to drive from the Rheingau to the Wachau.

As most Austrian vineyards lie in the wind and rain shadow of the Alps, the growers struggle with insufficient precipitation. Germany's climate is still "maritime," but Austria's is continental.

However, the dryness of climate in Austria allows for a large proportion of organic production, both in crops and grapes. Austria has the largest percentage of land in certified-organic production of any nation in the EU.

Let's take Riesling, and compare apples to apples.

Though it's only 4% of the vineyard plantings, Riesling produces a substantial majority of Austria's greatest white wines. They are nearly always bone dry. They are less fat than Alsatian wines have become, less sweet than (many) Alsatian wines have gotten, less earthy, yet more tensile and minerally. Compared directly with the *good* German Trockens, they have more body and juice, and they seem more generous. That said, there are tasters who prefer the *cooler* feel of the dry Germans, and who find Austrian Riesling too flamboyant. I myself don't have a preference; I like them both, each for its native virtues. But it's fair to say that dry German Riesling is all over the spectrum quality-wise, from brilliant terroir-wines to quite decent simpler wines to a still-distressingly-large number of yowling nasty wines. These you will *not* find in Austria. Riesling is destined to be dry here, and though you'll find dull or mediocre wines, you'll almost never find a shrill or biting one.

Austria is of course a smaller wine country than Germany. It also has a feverishly thirsty domestic clientele, who are served by an activist wine press who compete against one another to be the first with the earliest reviews, thus everyone's ass is up for grabs, so if you don't make at least decent wine, you'll be exposed in a hurry. Thus the **base-line of competence is markedly high in Austria**.

Austria's greatest contribution to the wine world is its native and signature grape variety, Grüner Veltliner. Most of you know it exists, yet there's a kind of stink to it, as in something that "used to be trendy." Think of the way you're discovering all these hitherto-unknown cool things from all over the place, and how much fun it is. That was Grüner Veltliner in the late 90s and early "aughts." And you don't want to repeat what those guys did; you want to do new things. Got it, and sympathize.

The problem is, what should have happened was to

recognize GV as a classic, whereas what did (too often) happen was it got swept into the rubbish pile of the previously fashionable.

You're not gonna like what I'm about to say, but in the service of truth I have to say it. Not one single thing that's since been discovered, trumped, lionized, promulgated, put on wine lists and talked about with giddy delight, not ONE. DAMN. THING. has been nearly as excellent as Grüner Veltliner. Put any of them in my face, and I'll just keep annoying you; Jura? Love them, not as good as GV. Timorosso? Very cool and interesting, not as good as GV. Doesn't matter what you push upon me; you are ignoring *much* sweeter and lower-hanging fruit in order to clamber to the top of the tree and pluck inferior material.

So I'm asking you to look again. Taste seriously and see what your Dollars (or your boss's) are actually buying, and then really, please, *do* make the best case you can that there's better wine for the money than GV will give. I want to hear it; it will help me. If you're right, it will humble my sad smug ass, which anyone will tell you is a good thing.

But I don't think you can. No one can.

The "marketing" of this point can seem a little needy, and I suppose it is, because we've been saying for twenty years that Grüner Veltliner ages fabulously, and ability to age is how we know to take a wine seriously, or so I've been told. An august panel was convened last October in New York, to taste a bunch of mature GVs; Aldo Sohm was on it, David Schildknecht, Jancis Robinson, Willi Klinger, and for some reason, me. My guys at Skurnik staged another tasting in January, of Rieslings and GVs from the Kamptal going back to 1969. I thought the point was made, but I was already sold. The only way to know how the tasters felt is to see what they do, whether they decide to take GV seriously as opposed to ensuring the few token wines are duly stocked.

Austria is also a markedly good producer of red wines, from three native varieties I'll describe in a few pages. These wines are not simple, but neither are they routinely grandiose and complex. They are wonderful medium-weight food-friendly fruit-driven wines. They are distinctive and individual. They get what wine's supposed to do at the table and in our lives. They're not afraid to be delicious. If you're someone who likes Foradori's basic Teroldego more than the Granato, your mind is ready for Austrian red. (And speaking of which: Lagrein? *Love Lagrein!* Blaufränkisch is better.)

That's the salient material. Ancillary but still important; Austria makes important Pinot Blanc, makes very good but often too expensive Sauvignon Blanc, is the world's largest supplier of Gelber Muskateller, which is a great stupid miracle when it's good, and makes often-decent wines from commonly seen international sorts, few of which I offer here. We don't need them.

Austria should be a major source for you. Too often it's just a niche or an afterthought. This is a wine culture unique in the world, building on the gravitas of centuries



but grabbing the chance to reinvent itself from scratch in the late 80s. It's youthful and fresh yet rooted and deep. It manages a miraculous balancing act between *being* cosmopolitan and sophisticated yet *making* fiercely individual wine that's saturated with identity. Looking for the good guys? These are the good guys. Please, support them generously. Theirs is still a wee little culture doing all the things we say we want, but somehow we've relegated them to not-as-cool as whatever the wine du jour is this month. I mean, I *want* all those cool new wines in the world, I like discovery. But I also like perspective.

To be entirely honest, I sometimes wonder whether these wines are actually too good for the larger audience I think they should have.

A thing like that can sound elitist. "Too good for the likes of *you*, Bucko." So go ahead and tag me. But if you do, I'll allow myself to observe that there are hundreds of wines on retail shelves and restaurant wine lists that are *not as good* as these wines and cost as much or more. Why, if you don't mind my asking? I submit that it's because there's an unacknowledged contempt toward anything with German words on the label, an underlying assumption that such wines can never be more than trivial and certainly aren't worth anything north of fifty Dollars. If I'm right, then I'm not an elitist; I'm just a sad and puzzled idealist.

Maybe I'm wrong and it isn't contempt, but rather fear. I find it odd that people who are serenely competent in all other walks of wine, who don't mind when they mangle the French, Italian or Spanish languages, are suddenly reduced to stammering helplessness as soon as

an umlaut appears. What is it about German that makes a person feel so abruptly incapable? Certainly the language isn't as euphonious as the romance languages, but that didn't stop the somm-glom from embracing "Txakolina," and God help me, if you can say "Sauvignon Blanc" you can say "Senftenberger Piri."

## THE QUESTION OF DRYNESS

Though Austria is properly a dry (white) wine culture, they're sometimes scaredy-cats when it comes to the untasteable but incredibly helpful few grams of RS by which many wines would be (even) more delightful and delicious, and sometimes profound.

In some cases they go too far. Dry means *dry*. The operating principle is don't interfere with the wine, so in vintages when fermentations go all the way the wines are very dry. Other times a few slovenly grams of sugar remain. It's as it happens.

I approve of a wine culture with an aversion to confecting, but this is an early stage of maturing into a culture which knows when to be rigid and when to relax. But we're ahead of ourselves. Suffice it to say I have never tasted and cannot imagine an Austrian white wine that was diminished by a *small* amount of residual sugar, undetectable as sweetness, but discernable as deeper fruit, more thrilling flavor (and incidentally more flexible at the table). And they could do it if they *wanted* to; Süßreserve (a.k.a. *Dosage*) has been legal for years now, though I know of no one actually using it. They



are very squeamish. I understand, since I'm squeamish too, but we're at different spots on the squeam-o-meter. Sure it's a slippery slope, and if you keep sliding down it you open the door to all kinds of manipulations. If! The fact is there's zero reason to assume this would happen. People need to trust themselves, and their palates.

After all, it stands to reason that if there are degrees of sweetness there are also degrees of dryness. There is soft-creamy dry and there's accommodating dry and there's very crisp dry and there's fierce austere dry and there's even this-could-use-some-damn-sugar dry, and it's nothing but obtuse to assume dryness *as such* is a value. It's just a way for a wine to be, one of a thousand ways. "We want our wines to be *dry*" is too often an excuse for failing to consider how *individual* wines taste, and whether their *particular* dryness is agreeable, or the best thing for that very wine.

These are matters of taste, or they ought to be, yet often I suspect there are several too many shoulds and gottas going on before the fact. There are too many people who cling to the *Idea* that sugar is evil, sugar is pabulum, sugar is how bad wines are disguised; therefore sugar is to be avoided on principle *unless it can't be*, in which case you invoke the even more prevalent principle that wines shouldn't be manipulated. In other words, sugar's O.K. but only when you can't help it. Well, sigh. This is the kind of thing seductive to wine writers but somewhere oblique to the truth.

Each time I raised these issues with growers, I saw them trying to hide their dismay behind a veil of politeness. Some were willing to agree that *Rieslings*

could indeed benefit from a mini-dollop of sweetness, but not Grüner Veltliner. That should always be dry; it tastes better that way. I'm suspicious of uniform opinions, but O.K., the world can probably do without GrüVes carrying little bits of sweetness. Or? The next-to-last GV grower at whom I tasted was Hofer, and he's really a non-interventionist, being organic and all. And one of his GrüVes had a few grams of RS—and tasted absolutely wonderful. I think a couple questions are at play here. To one's own taste one should always be faithful. If you truly hate sweetness then you shouldn't consume it. For the rest of us—the 99.8% rest of us—perhaps a little flexibility is in order.

## \* THE 2013 VINTAGE \*

No reason to be coy. For Riesling and Grüner Veltliner this is a classic vintage, a serious candidate for Greatness, and the best young crop I've tasted since the 1999s.

They made me nostalgic, because I was carried back to the days of tasting those 90s vintages, at least the good ones, before everything got overripe and botryisey. Certainly there've been no "bad" vintages since '99, but you had to tiptoe around and pluck the best wines with your delicate little fingers. And these 2013s behave in similar ways to those great 90s wines I first tasted and fell in love with. They can seem demure when poured, but they blossom lavishly with air. (They have this in common with the German '13s.), They do the delayed-finish thing I first noticed about Austrian wines twenty

years ago. You spit or swallow the wine and it seems to be gone. Or so you think. Ten seconds later it returns, having transformed itself into a semi-solid so obdurate you wonder if it will ever leave your palate. And you ask, how can this be?

Often there's a shadow side even to superb vintages, an issue or a common flaw. But not these. I really can find no fault with them. They give me every single thing I could ever desire from Austrian wines. They are almost gushingly fragrant; they arrive like morning birds, trilling and alive. They're *sappy*, as though you could squeeze chlorophyll from them. They remind me of Styrian wines, in fact. They're driven by clarity, fruit and terroir. They're focused and full of substance. They have moderate alcohol! They're clean and hale and chipper, from the little wee ones in Liters to the very great ones from the top sites. They are never self-important, never haughty. They cover you with mama-love, baby!

At the end of the first day tasting I felt, "If the rest of the days are like this, we're in for a good week." By day-3 I had given three plusses to seven wines on that day alone, after not quite having reached that ecstatic summit in Germany or Champagne over three weeks in March. A couple days later I watched as Martin Nigl had *exactly* the vintage he was born to have. Again and again I felt "This is a career-making vintage for this grower."

It also appears to be markedly excellent for Pinot Blanc and Sauvignon Blanc. It had mixed results from Gelber Muskateller, some of which were (for fear of botrytis) picked too soon, and which are meager and catty. Some, but not all.

The reds are said to be light. That causes me no great concern, as good growers will make lovely wines unless there's an essential flaw. We'll see next year.

It was a late harvest, and the meteorology of the vintage was unremarkable except for the very late beginning and uneven flowering. Cool and warm periods alternated, and as the Fall lingered on there were no issues with rots. The growers talked about high acidity, and by their standards it was noteworthy, but I tasted no wines in which acids were marked. (The prevailing acids for GV run between 6g/l and 7, and for Riesling between 6.8 and 7.8.) But I emphasize there were very few times I felt "This wine is zippy!" but many times I felt *What a lovely paradox, so much detail with so much substance with so much liveliness.*

There are always worthy wines in each vintage, and our jobs are to find them and see which ones best fit what we're doing. But this is a vintage to **buy as a vintage**. This is a year to talk about in terms of "How much 2013 Austrian did you buy?" If you are a younger reader, you have never seen an Austrian year like this, and now you can see the wines at their apex.

You will only demur if you lay high emphasis on a vintage being "monumental." 2013 doesn't froth and spume. It is lilting and lively, mischievous and delightful; its gravitas is lyrical, not tragic. And I am aware that a

wine needs a certain force and surge to be truly great.. What reassures me about these '13s is, even as the top wines are transparent and articulate—some would say "light" because the alcohols aren't bellicose—the ordinary wines have amazing substance. The vintage as a whole stands on solid ground.

People will debate whether it's a Riesling or a GrüVe vintage, and I'd say it's a classic for both, but that most of the very best wines were Rieslings. As is logical, Riesling being, you know, the best grape.

So, I'll stick my neck out with "classic," because I just had one hell of a good week tasting, but I'll reserve "Great" for the fullness of time.

## HIGHLIGHTS AND SUPERLATIVES

...are difficult in a year where there were nothing but highlights and the entire crop was superlative. I'll let you into the process.

THE WINERY OF THE VINTAGE is often somewhat fraught. If it's a tiny estate there won't be enough wine. But I think that shouldn't matter. As it happens, I have to say it's a tie between two names you know well. And so...

### THE WINERIES OF THE VINTAGE

**Alzinger**, from whom we're getting a *little* more wine, but not enough to supply y'all, but sheesh, you can't have *four* three-plus Rieslings in a row and not pay some kind of homage.

And **Gobelsburg**, from who we do have enough wine, and whose success was perhaps even more marked *across* Riesling and GV.

### OTHER SUPERB COLLECTIONS OF 2013s

Well, jeez, *everyone's*.

But a few growers soared so far above their prevailing norms that attention must be paid. These include, dramatically, **SETZER**, who showed the best vintage I've ever tasted from them, and **NIGL**, who just had a perfect *Nigl* vintage, his exact type of wine rendered as perfectly as can be.

### WINE OF THE VINTAGE

**HEIDI SCHRÖCK'S** sublime, haunting **Furmint**. She's never made a better one, and this wine is a bringer-of-soul in any case. But the criterion for this choice is not "quality" as-such, but rather *significance*. The Furmint is indeed beautiful, among many other beautiful wines. And the experience it offers is more allusive, resonant and gentle than anything else I tasted.

### OTHER MARKEDLY SPLENDID WINES, ACROSS PRICE POINTS

**NIKOLAIHOF** **Grüner Veltliner Federspiel Im Weingebirge**.

**HIEDLER Loess**, an astonishing performance for an “everyday” wine.

**ECKER Grüner Veltliner Mordthal**, the best in many years, and the first in many years to come in below 14% alc.

### THE WINE OF THE COLLECTION

Opening the offering beyond the 2013s, and excluding wines offered last year, it's a tie between **BRUNDELMAYER'S** profound, supernal **2012 Riesling Lyra**, and **PRIELER'S** amazingly accessible **2011 Blaufränkisch Goldberg**.

### THE BEST MUSCAT THIS YEAR

...is **BERGER'S**, with a nod to **SCHWARZBÖCK**.

### THE GREAT ROSÉ

...is, of course, *Heidi Schröck's "Biscaya."* But our boy **PRIELER** is coming up fast.

### THE ZANY-HIP WINES

...any somm would be stoked to have especially if not many others had them, include **GLATZER'S** single-vineyard Sauvignon Blanc *Schüttenberg*, **NIGL'S** Grüner Veltliner Eiswein, **HIEDLER'S** Muscat Ottonel—and let's face it, you'll be the only somm in your zip-code to have a wild-yeast fermented Ottonel to serve with that uni prep that's been giving you trouble—and **SETZER'S** Roter Veltliner *Kreimelberg*.

### SURPRISES AND ODDITIES TO PUT ON YOUR SHORT-LIST

**NIGL** Sauvignon Blanc  
**HOFER** Zweigelt Rosé

### ANOTHER LOOK AT 2012

'13 shows '12 in high relief, and shows how dense, creamy and (sometimes) brooding '12 is. Few are left to be had, but I like this vintage, except for the ones that got too ripe. If you like solidity and impact, you'll like 2012, and if you like sprightliness and substance you'll like 2013, and the beauty is, you don't have to choose.

### FIRST AMONG EQUALS

Once again I will highlight special favorites by use of one, two and three pluses (+, ++, +++). Call it my subjective short-list. It has to do with a quality of being stunned by a wine, and it can happen with “small” wines or big ones; it has to do with quality of flavor as much as with rendering of flavor.

One plus means something like one Michelin star. Pay particular attention to this wine. Try not to miss it.

Two pluses is like two Michelin stars, getting close to as-good-as-it-gets now, no home should be without it. It's indispensable.

Three pluses almost never appear, because these

are the wines that go where you simply cannot imagine anything better. Like three Michelin stars. There are rarely more than a wine or two per year that reach this level, 'cause your intrepid taster has to be virtually flattened with ecstasy.

There is sentiment to the effect that using any form of highlighting is invidious, since it damns the wines without pluses as also-rans. Obviously that's not the case, but I agree there's a danger whenever one establishes a hierarchy based on scores, even in such a primitive system as mine. But there's also a pragmatic consideration at play; you can't buy every wine in this offering, and my pluses try to answer the implied question *What should I not miss no matter what?* And of course you'll still pore through the prose for my many jokes and puns, and the Masonic messages I've cannily embedded within it. I'm also aware there can be political ramifications at play, and I ask you to believe I do my best to ignore them. A grower might feel slighted if he doesn't get enough pluses. A guy who luvved me for all the pluses I gave him last year might wonder what happened if he got fewer or none this year. The pressure's on—and at the moment of tasting, I don't care. Nothing matters but the wine.

### WHEN TO DRINK THE WINES

You can drink GrüVe either very young if you enjoy its primary fruit, or very old if you like mature flavors. GrüVe seems to age in a steady climb. Naturally the riper it is the longer it goes, but in general it doesn't start showing true tertiary flavors till it's about 12 years old. Even then it's just a patina. Around 20-25 it starts tasting like grown-up mature wine—but still not *old*. Wait a little longer.

Riesling, amazingly, ages faster. In certain vintages it takes on the flavor-known-as “petrol,” which it later sheds. Great Austrian Riesling will certainly make old bones—30-40 years for the best wines—but all things being equal GrüVe tastes younger at every point along the way. So: young is always good. If you want mature overtones wait about ten years. If you want a completely mature wine, wait about twenty.

Even more improbable; Pinot Blanc can make it to fifteen or even twenty years quite easily. If you want to wait, you'll end up with something recalling a somewhat rustic white Burgundy. Mr. Hiedler has shown me more than a few striking old masterpieces, but then, he has The Touch with this variety.

### A NOTE ON MY USE OF THE WORD "URGESTEIN"

I have tended to use this term as the Austrians do, to refer to a family of metamorphic soils based on primary rock. While it's a useful word, you should bear in mind Urgestein isn't a single soil but a general group of soils. There are important distinctions among it: some soils have more mica, silica, others are schistuous

(fractured granite), still others contain more gneiss. Hirsch's twin-peaks of Gaisberg and Heiligenstain are both classed as Urgestein sites, yet they're quite different in flavor.

### A NOTE ON MY USE OF THE PHRASE SECRET SWEETNESS

This emphatically does not denote a wine with camouflaged residual sugar; in fact it doesn't refer to sugar as such at all. It attempts to describe a deeply embedded ripe-tasting flavor that *suggests* sweetness but which is in fact the consequence of physiological ripeness. Most of us know by now there are two things both called "ripeness": one is the actual measure of sugar in the grape (or must), which can be ostensibly "ripe" even when other markers of underripeness (e.g. bitter seeds or high malic acids) are present; the other is a fuller ripeness when both seeds and skins are sweet. Austrian whites from physiologically ripe fruit often convey a kind of sweet echo even when they contain little or no actual sugar. I like my little phrase "secret" sweetness, because it's a sweetness that seems to hide from you, though you're sure it is there. But if you look straight at it, *poof*, it's gone. Look away and there it is again. It only consents to let itself be inferred. This I just love.

### OTHER VAGUE NOTIONS ABOUT TASTING NOTES

I'm a geek for flavor. Approach me at a farmer's market and offer a sample of an apple, and I'll probably say no. Offer me samples of *five different* apples and I'm all over it. I love variations on a theme. And so I've lately discovered the fascinating variety of black peppercorns out there, and now our kitchen is full of them. And we're a pair of geeks, my former chef-wife and I, so we're creating a working pepper lab to try and suss what goes best with what. I tell you this because you're going to see some weird words in a few of my notes – other than those I regularly use—and while they don't help you if you've never tasted these things, they're accurate and thus I need to explain them.

The *sweet* peppercorns are primarily the wild Madagascar, which is markedly fruity and complex, and this Nepalese one called Timut that smells amazingly like tangerines.

The more "serious" ones include the Lompoc from Indonesia, and the all-time great Sarawak, which is smoky and truffly. There are numerous others; a French company sells a slew of them in little graduated-cylinders, and a man named Akesson is just like a wine merchant, visiting the producers and selling terroir-specific and vintage-dated peppercorns. Look here if you're interested: [www.akessons-organic.com](http://www.akessons-organic.com).

Tasting notes are strange in any case. I delved into the subject in my book along more speculative lines. Here they serve an ostensible purpose, which is to tell you what

the wines tasted like so as to help you decide what (or if) to buy. But they keep getting away from me. I try to be carefully specific and concrete, but it's against my nature, and I sometimes feel as if a wine is grabbing my hand to lead me somewhere it knows I should go. If at that enticing point I'm furiously trying to figure out which color of iris it smells like, it walks away in dismay and I'll never know where it might have taken me.

Not to mention, have you or has anyone ever made a buying decision because a wine smelled like brambleberries or rather like huckleberries? "I just *have* to have more wines that smell like huckleberries on my list (or in my store)!" Dude, I doubt it. If these notes consciously "try" to do anything, it's to paint the most visceral possible picture of the wine, and sometimes that assumes the form of something definite and other times something ethereal. The meta-message is, we don't need to defeat the poor wine by mastering its every conceivable nuance. We need to join with it as it invites. Your process may differ depending on where you are in your wine life, but the true prize is not to master, but to surrender.

### THE QUESTIONS OF ORGANICS

First, I'm not going to politicize this issue, because I don't grow grapes or make wine for a living, and thus it would be fatuous of me to preach to people who *do*, about living up to my precious standards. What I'll do instead is say what I see on the ground, and suggest what I hope will be useful positions.

The consensus among serious growers is to go as far as prudence will allow toward organic growing. Few of them use chemical fertilizers, or pesticides or herbicides, but many of them either use or *reserve the right* to use fungicides. Nearly every grower I know (or with whom I've discussed these issues) is mindful of the need for sustainability. Some of them just do their thing and answer only to their own conscience. Others belong to various organizations certifying and controlling what's called "Integrated" growing, wherein the allowable spraying compounds are detailed and enforced. There are two ways to look at this. One says these growers are just lazy or risk-averse and "integrated" growing is just a green-wash for something not much better than conventional/ chemical. I doubt many people who hold that opinion have ever had to support a family as winery proprietors, but their ferocity is at least well meant. The other opinion—the one I myself hold—is that any step in the right direction is to be encouraged, and it's very likely the world is more improved if most people are taking those steps than if only a few are, because when forced to choose between all or nothing, they choose nothing.

The truly organic or biodynamic estates can choose whether to certify by various means, and most of them do. I have one certified-organic and two



biodynamic estates in this assortment. The political issues around certification can be thorny, especially if one's a lone wolf by nature. But what's the alternative? If you won't certify, do you really have a right to the claim of "organic" or "biodynamic?" After all, anyone can *talk* whatever he pleases, but the ones who endure the paperwork and the politics ought to be the only ones with rights to the power of the organic "brand."

My position is to encourage the growers with whom I work to take whatever steps they can in an organic direction. I don't think it improves their wines in ways you can taste discretely, though conscientiousness in one thing often implies conscientiousness in all things. Most important, I don't subject my growers to any sort of purity test with only pass/fail as options. There are reasonable approaches other than mine, and I respect them, but this one works for me.

## AUSTRIAN RED WINES

In my early days I didn't go looking for red wines. In one case (Glatzer) they found me and I was glad. But it seemed that my then-major competitor was claiming that ground, and it made sense; his approach to Austrian wine was through Italy, whereas mine was through Germany.

But over time I encountered these winning red wines more frequently, and I found them ever-harder to resist. Prieler and then Sattler were added, and I started to study the native varieties, and also to drink the wines more often at home. Still, this portfolio was overwhelmingly

white-wine oriented, and the few reds available were afterthoughts.

That had to change. Because I found myself believing more and more strongly in the red wines in general, and in Blaufränkisch in particular. I mean to make a Statement: we yield to no one in our Austrian red wine offering. For I am growing more secure by the day, that these new reds from this old/new culture are providing the greatest drinking pleasure available per Dollar—unless you need your socks knocked off, your blocks busted, or your whelm overed. If you're willing to "settle" for beautiful, elegant mid-weight food-luvvin wines that have *all the concentration and intensity they need to do the job*, but not so much as to scream for your exclusive attention, then you and I have something to talk about.

Austrian red wine is to be taken seriously, that much is beyond dispute. What I am selecting are just what I like best, wines with poise, grace and elegance but also with length and density. Neither I nor my growers are into shock-and-awe wines; we all know how facile it is to make those inky dull creatures. Even the biggest wines from my producers—what I call their super-Tuscans— never let the flavor-needle lurch into the red.

A few Austrian reds can stand with the great wines of the world; not the greatest, but certainly the great. And it is gratifying to note a growing appreciation within Austria for reds with attributes of grace instead of mere brute power. Anyone can make such wines if you grow grapes in a hot enough climate, and they all have a pall about them, something withering and obtuse. Yet this singularly prevalent idiom is becoming less attractive to

many Austrian vintners, who seem to have discovered what makes their wines unique and desirable, and who've set about to nurture it. Good for them! One symptom of this growing enlightenment appears among the Sattler offering. Erich did away with his "super-Tuscan" wine (which he called Cronos) and is using that fruit for single-varietal bottlings of stellar-class Zweigelt and St. Laurent. I'd like to see others follow suit.

About twenty years ago, when Austria was still deciding whether it wanted to be Bordeaux, Burgundy or Tuscany, the growers planted the usual suspects, and you'll still find them here and there: Pinot Noir, Cabernet, Merlot, plus someone has Zinfandel planted somewhere. But there's a discernable and laudable return to the several indigenous varieties, of which there are three types to interest us, each unusual, and each offering something we cannot find elsewhere.

The easy one is *Zweigelt*, because it almost always tastes marvelous and it always smells seductive. You know the way certain people just seem effortlessly funny? Zweigelt seems effortlessly tasty. Only a churl could dislike it. Then comes *St. Laurent* (pronounced to rhyme with "zonked cow rent"), which is harder to grow but almost as easy to adore as Zweigelt. It's suave and earthy, and you love it if you love the funky side of Pinot.

And then there's *Blaufränkisch*, which I feel is the master class in Austro-reds, the last taste to be acquired but the one with the most abiding fascination and offering a pleasure deeper than joy. Details are comin' right up.

**ZWIEGELT:** The last word in red wine! Rolls right off the tongue, eh? Well it rolls right off *my* tongue and down my happy throat, because at its best this is oh-so-drinkable. It always smells great! It's a cross of St. Laurent with Blaufränkisch and its most overt fruit note is sweet cherry, but there's more to the best wines. Imagine if you could somehow skim the top notes off of really ripe Syrah, so that you had the deeply juicy fruit and could leave the animal-herbal aspects behind. That might be Zweigelt. It also does interesting things in the glass. If you like its high tones of black cherry and huckleberry you should drink it without aeration. In a carafe though, it seems to default back to its St. Laurent parentage, growing more and more "Burgundian" with oxygen. There are also some Zweigelts that offer the dusty tannin and beautiful weedyess of Blaufränkisch.

**SANKT LAURENT:** A très hip grape, folks. It's Pinot Noir-ish with a "sauvage" touch, and it can do nearly all the things fine Pinot Noir does, but with added bottom notes of sagey wildness. More growers would plant it, but the vine itself is prone to mutation and it can rarely be left in the ground for more than twenty years or so. It won't flower unless the weather's perfect. It produces a tight cluster of thin-skinned berries, and is thus subject to rot if conditions aren't ideal. "You have to be a little crazy to grow this grape," said one grower. And all kinds of growers are stepping up to the challenge; St. Laurent has become the trendy grape, and I gotta tell ya,

I absolutely love it. If you love good Burgundy but can't afford to *drink* good Burgundy, this variety will satisfy you all kinds of ways.

At first St-L was thought to be a genetic mutation of Pinot Noir, but modern ampelography has proven this to be false. Still, we really don't know *what* this grape is. Modern theories suggest it's a Burgundy grape of some kind with the other parent being either an unknown or an extinct variety.

It's the fastest-growing red grape in Austria (from a small base, of course), having nearly doubled in acreage since 1999, while remaining a distant 5th among all red grapes planted. Though there are 11 known clones, none of them is anything but a bitch to grow. I remain convinced that if this grape and its wines came from *anyplace* that didn't speak German, it would be megatrendy in our fair land.

Finally there's the **BLAUFRÄNKISCH**. It's of the cabernet type, a little bricky and capsule-y, and when it's unripe it's slightly vegetal. In fact I think the quality-spread is widest here. Most of Austria's greatest red wines are made entirely or mostly from Blaufränkisch, yet weak Blaufränkisch is less pleasing than weak Zweigelt. (I've yet to taste a truly crummy St. Laurent.) I'd still put it in the Malbec-y school (whereas the Zweigelt is Syrah-y and the Sankt Laurent is Pinot-y). Zweigelt is for spaghetti, Sankt Laurent is for duck or squab, and Blaufränkisch is for lamb chops. A perfect three-course meal!

I'm gonna stake a couple claims for the hipness of Blaufränkisch. First, Bob Parker seems to think it's garbage. At least he lumped it together with a lot of *truly* mediocre grapes in a tirade he recently unleashed about young wine hipsters and their questionable tastes. A reasonable case can be made for arranging wine in orders of salience, and wines aren't worthwhile just *because* they're from somewhere new. But people won't listen if you're scolding them. And then there was the unpardonable sin of dissing Blaufränkisch, a variety one of Bob's own writers gave "96 points" to on one occasion. And yet it makes sense, if your basic frame of reference is that red wines should always have low acidity. Our friend BF has a lot of acidity, roughly the same as Champagne. You could say it's a red wine suitable for those who really like white wine, the clarity, high-definition and the ability to scintillate. Blaufränkisch is the wine Grüner Veltliner would be, if it were red, just as I've heard it said that Cab Franc is the "red Sauvignon Blanc."

In fact there seems to be a kind of awakening within Austria, whereby the Blaufränkisch is being discovered to be a fascinating and remarkable variety. David Schildknecht published a magnificently comprehensive and scholarly piece in *Wine & Spirits* bringing us all up to speed on the general state of thinking among the grape's growers and consumers. I asked David a few questions, because I wished to consult an impartial observer before I issued some grand statement I wouldn't be able to support.

**TT: What claim does Blaufränkisch stake to uniqueness?**

DS: Both I and those who grow this grape have trouble describing the results for novices in terms of more familiar grapes and genres, a typical answer – depending of course in part on style and terroir – being “a bit like a Northern Rhône; a bit like a Piedmontese Nebbiolo; a bit like certain Burgundian Pinots; a bit like a genuinely great cru Beaujolais...” When you find yourself reaching for such diverse and distinctively delicious points of comparison and still coming up short, then, I’d argue, you know you are in the presence of something uniquely special... [and] that’s pretty exalted company to keep.

And speaking of terroir and style, when you find a grape as responsive to the one and adaptable to the other, that too is special.

I’m not sure of another cépage that enjoys the position of Blaufränkisch as regards our experience of its aging potential. Serious solo flights with this grape only began in earnest two decades ago, but it’s already clear that a) you don’t appreciate its full potential until you taste 10-15 year old examples and b) scarcely any of the earliest efforts by the most earnest, original, and risk-taking growers have yet faded in the bottle, so we have good reason to believe that today’s top wines will age beautifully for many years and as yet virtually no reason to speculate what will be their allotted span. Silvia Prieler just wrote me after reading my recent article that she places utmost importance on Blaufränkisch’s ability to reveal new charms over many years as well as on the fact that we don’t yet know how many. (TT: my emphasis)

**TT: Is there a sense in which it is particularly Austrian? I have said “If Grüner Veltliner were red, it would be Blaufränkisch.” Is that statement supportable?**

DS: There is such a sense insofar as Blaufränkisch is arguably the other grape in Austria’s menagerie that is capable of greatness; highly site-sensitive; stylistically malleable; and (as yet anyway) rare and unproven outside Austria. I suppose one might be able to conjure up notions of national character and varietal character and claim that one is somehow especially fitting to the other, but I suspect the variations on that game are endless, which is to say unchecked by any evidence but only by the limits of the player’s cleverness. And I know not to challenge you on that field, Herr Theise!

**TT: Given all the variety of attractive red wines in the world, what is the salient case for including Blaufränkisch in a merchant’s (sommelier, retailer, wholesaler, importer) offering?**

DS: Virtually every merchant I know has a personally felt need as well as a significant cadre of customers who are on the lookout for something “new” to set alongside the rather small canon of cépages or cépage-terroir combinations that dominate the market and wine literature. The question then is whether the newness wears off. Given the rapidity with which Blaufränkisch is being transported by growers ever-closer to sublimity (100-point Nirvana ;-); the dazzling diversity it reveals in response to terroir and human stylistic ideals; its fascinating flexibility at table; the mystery of “how will it end?” in the bottle; not to mention the colorful and outspoken cast of growers that champion it, I don’t think the sense of discovery will wear off on wine lovers in any hurry.

**TT: When Blaufränkisch fails, it’s usually because...**

DS: ...growers try to take shortcuts in order to render an inexpensive “Blaufränkisch 101.” This variety needs some breathing space – and, above all, time – in cask to really reveal its virtues. As I’ve written before, “Blaufränkisch punch” is no more interesting than “Pinot punch” and since by contrast Zweigelt, Gamay, or Grenache can be irresistibly delicious after only a short post-fermentative stay in tank, let them continue to dominate the \$10-15 retail realm (even as they of course excel also in more exalted variations). ...or because some still try to treat it as if it were Merlot or Cabernet or they were in Bordeaux ...or (perhaps in that same connection) try to compensate for vine material that gives low skin-to-juice ratio by extracting more aggressively.

**TT: Even decent average Blaufränkisch will show you...**

DS: Dimensions that go well beyond fruits and berries.

**TT: Great Blaufränkisch is unique among wines in showing...**

DS: I struggle to answer this because the styles and soil influences are so varied; the “end point” in bottle maturation a mystery; and because to pull out a few traits and imply that their



*conjunction is sufficient to establish a unique description is probably inherently an exercise in overreach. But there are nearly always dimensions that find one reaching for floral and mineral vocabulary; there is generally an aura of smokiness; and a combination of refreshing and invigorating primary juiciness with faintly, attractively grainy texture.*

Thanks David. I feel better now. I'd also add that the more I drink this variety the more it feels right-bank Bordeaux-ish to me, or even like Malbec as it grows in Cahors. And yet there's something that resists direct analogy to *any* other variety, except to observe that it isn't "sweet" like Zweigelt and it isn't "round" the way St. Laurent is. Blaufränkisch is incisive, pointed, full of herbs and spices and weeds, very seldom especially "fruity" but often like berries and smoke. As I looked around for the right supplier(s), I found myself repelled by anyone who used too much blatant new wood or whose wines were obtrusively tannic. Tannin is innate to the variety, and when it's balanced it adds an agreeable jolt of dust to the varietal juiciness. I found that if I searched for elegance, that BF's native complexity would invariably follow. I also wanted variety within the variety, and among Prieler, Wallner and Krutzler there's no redundancy that I can see.

Having (as it were) graduated to Blaufränkisch, I find there's no turning back. It scratches an itch. I cherish its little bite. And it isn't remotely "difficult" like Tannat or Mondeuse or Trousseau can (sometimes) be; it's delicious but not *dee-lish*, if you see what I mean. I even entertain the radical thought that Summer Of Riesling could easily segue into Winter Of Blaufränkisch without missing a beat.

Below the echelon in which red wine is Earnestly Great, I need it to be delicious. It bores me when it affects the attributes of "greatness" (which usually

means overextraction, overoaking and too much alcohol) and does not deliver. Just because you wear a muscle shirt don't mean you got muscles. I am a great lover of tasty reds, which usually fall at or below 13% alc and which just seem to *drain* out of the bottle, you drink them so fast. For me, a red wine is truly great when it gladdens the senses and flatters the food. That's the baseline. You can add mystery and complexity and atmosphere, you can add length, power and concentration, but you reach a point where an excess of pleasure becomes a kind of soreness.

Two final pieces of happy news: there is a tangible retreat away from oak as a dominating flavor, and a concomitant appreciation of its great value as a seasoning. Growers have more confidence their wines don't need the pancake makeup of 300% new barriques. Second, there's a developing story that concerns the remarkable improvement of the red wines from regions once thought to be white-wine only. Maybe it's climate change. But after the whole French Paradox thing broke, lots of growers felt they had to make a token red wine or two, just so the customer wouldn't have to go elsewhere for them. Most of those wines were pretty anemic, and a few of them are still pretty clunky. But more and more of them are viable, attractive and very tasty beings. We don't sell them very much, because (I think) you prefer to spend your red-wine Dollar on a grower who specializes in reds. Makes sense. But you're missing out on some very tasty numbers.

Herewith a list of reds-from-white-wine growers, which I plead with you not to ignore:

- Hofer
- Ecker
- Schloss Gobelsburg
- Berger
- Setzer
- Bründlmayer

It was on my first trip to Austria. In the achingly beautiful region of South Styria, I was sitting in a sweet little country restaurant waiting for my food to arrive. Bread was brought, dark and sweet, and then a little bowl of the most unctuous looking oil I'd ever seen was placed before me, clearly for dunking, but this stuff looked **serious**, and I wasn't going to attempt it till I knew what it was. Assured by my companion that it wouldn't grow hair on my palms, I slipped a corner of bread into it and tasted.

And my culinary life was forever changed.

Since then everyone, without exception, who has visited Austria has come back raving about this food. It's like a sweet, sexy secret a few of us share. Once you taste it, you can barely imagine how you ever did without it. I wonder if there's another foodstuff in the world as littleknown and as intrinsically spectacular as this one.

### What It Tastes Like and How It's Used

At its best, it tastes like an ethereal essence of the seed. It is dark, intense, viscous; a little goes a long way. In Austria it is used as a condiment; you dunk bread in it, drizzle it over salads, potatoes, eggs, mushrooms, even soups; you can use it in salad dressings (in which case you may *cut* it with extra-virgin olive oil, lest it become *too* dominant!); there are doubtless many other uses which I am too big a food clod to have gleaned. If you develop any hip ideas and don't mind sharing them —attributed of course—I'd be glad to hear from you. THE FACTS: this oil is the product of a particular kind of pumpkin, smaller than ours, and green with yellow stripes rather than orange. The main factor in the quality of the oil is, not surprisingly, the **QUALITY OF THE SEEDS THEMSELVES**. Accordingly, they are hand-scooped out of the pumpkin at harvest time; it's quite picturesque to see the women sitting in the pumpkin patches at their work—though the work is said to be arduous.

### Other Decisive Factors for Quality Are:

1. Seeds of local origin. Imported seeds produce an inferior oil.
2. Hand-sorting. No machine can do this job as well as attentive human eyes and hands.
3. Hand-washing of the seeds. Machine-washed seeds, while technically clean, lose a fine silvery-green bloom that gives the oils its incomparable flavor.
4. Temperature of roasting. The lower the temperature, the nuttier the flavor. Higher temperatures give a more roasted taste. Too high gives a course, scorched flavor.

5. Relative gentleness or roughness of mashing.

The seeds are mashed as they roast, and the more tender the mashing, the more polished the final flavor.

To make a quick judgment on the quality of the oil, look at the color of the "rim" if you pour the oil into a shallow bowl. It should be virtually opaque at the center, but vivid green at the rim. If it's too brown, it was roasted too long.

After roasting and mashing, the seeds are pressed and the oil emerges. And that's all. It cools off and gets bottled. And tastes miraculous.

### Storing and Handling

The oils are natural products and therefore need attentive treatment. Store them in a cool place; if the oil is overheated it goes rancid. Guaranteed shelf-life if stored properly is twelve to eighteen months from bottling. Bottling dates are indicated on the label.

### The Assortment

In the early days I tasted a wide variety of oils and selected the three millers whose oils I liked best. Typical wine-geek, eh! I couldn't confine it to just one; oh no, there were too many *interesting* distinctions between them. Well, time passed by and I began to see the sustainable level of business the oils would bring. If we were in the fancy-food matrix we'd be selling a ton of these oils (they really are that good and that unique) but we're wine merchants and we don't have the networks or contacts. So I'm reducing the assortment to just one producer, my very favorite: **HIRSCHMANN**.

Leo Hirschmann makes the La Tâche of pumpkin seed oil. It has amazing polish and complexity.

### Bottle sizes

The basic size is 500 ml. Liter bottles are also available, which might be useful for restaurants who'd like to lower the per-ounce cost. Finally we offer **250ml** bottles, ideal for retailers who'd like to get the experimental impulse sale; the oil can be priced below \$20 in the lil' bottle.

**OAT-003** (12/250ml)

**OAT-007** (12/500ml)

**OAT-010** (6/1.0L)

# Prieler

Neusiedlersee-Hügelland // Schützen

vineyard area // 20 hectares  
annual production // 8,000 cases  
top sites & soil types // **Goldberg** (slate); **Seeberg**,  
**Sinner** (limestone, mica schist); **Ungerbergen** (limestone with pebbles)  
grape varieties // 30% **Blafränkisch**, 15% **Cabernet Sauvignon**,  
14% **Pinot Noir**, 10% **Chardonnay**, 10% **Merlot**, 10% **Pinot Blanc**,  
8% **St. Laurent**, 3% **Welschriesling**



*“Ronnie” the schnauzer had just returned from the dog friseur the day I visited, and seemed to be a little mixed up, as if he didn’t recognize himself.*



He certainly was the very illustration you’d see in a book of dog breeds: **The Schnauzer**. He likes to be scratched, but what dog doesn’t? He ought to have sported a monacle.

Georg Prieler is the proud Daddy of a baby boy, and if that weren’t enough, in the last year he’s begun to establish his regime. For a while he shared the winery with his sister Silvia, but last year she returned to her original life as a scientist, and now it’s just our hero alone. And he’s starting to mold the estate into the shape he finds agreeable. Some of these changes are ones we won’t see, as they concern wines I haven’t been offering. Others are

seen incrementally, if you remember how the wines were and see how they’ve shifted.

He has his parents there, both to do some of the work and also to provide “institutional memory,” and he can always call Silvia, something which she says he’s doing less and less often. Georg and I spent a good long time together and he didn’t seem at all tentative or overwhelmed.

So: Prieler is a classic Burgenland estate making about 75% red wine, supplemented by white and Rosé. As a rule the whites are somewhat Provençal in nature, i.e., dry, stony and delicately herbal. Only the basic Pinot Blanc shows more “sweet” langoustine and acacia-blossom notes.

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**Prieler at a glance** // An estate both admired and beloved within Austria, for hearty yet focused whites and sumptuous deeply structured reds, both of which are undergoing certain deft transitions; the whites more primary (i.e., less malo) and the reds more succulent (i.e., fewer gravelly tannins).

The reds differ by variety, with the Blaufränkisch leading, a markedly deep wine that sometimes broods but often sings. It can be tannic but is never coarse. There's a Pinot Noir that's a perennial "work-in-progress," there's a Cabernet that's quite impressive, and even some Merlot. But I think Georg will move away from these, except for the Cab. Because it's with Blaufränkisch that he really shines.

Prieler's Blaufränkisch is rangy, touching on spurting fruit, smoke and pepper, moving toward a fine animal richness and reaching its pinnacle with a liquid-iron minerality and power that makes you think of Pomerol. The wines used to show a lot of gravelly tannin, but they don't any more. They're more grown up now, and they'll meet you more than half way.

### 2013 Rosé vom Stein +

AEP-097

Along with Schröck's *Biscaya*, this is the year-rounder, the most vinous and substantive Rosé we have. 80-20 BF-Merlot, it even shows minerality (Blaufränkisch baby!), textured, spicy and long; a steel bolt dissolved in raspberry cream. For improbable intricacy of texture and mineral, I know of few Rosés that equal it.

### 2013 Pinot Blanc Seeborg

AEP-100

Never forget how long you can keep these, and how wonderful they become. For this is serious Pinot Blanc meant to be aged. The '13 is really "sweet" and scallop-y, with a vivid herbal-floral and yellow fruit profile, showing more mineral from the Zalto glass everyone uses (for reasons that elude me) but more richness from the tulip I asked to use, also more defined and pointed. This will get all nutty, meyer-lemony and brown-buttery in as little as 5-7 years.

### 2013 Chardonnay Ried Sinner

AEP-098

"I get bored with these overloaded wines people say are *mineral* but actually aren't," says Georg, correctly. So this is steel-vinified and aged, with a lot of lees contact. The '13 shows a lot of texture and sweet fruit; acacia blossoms, super-fragrant, salty crisp fish-skin, *fines herbs* and roasted hay. It's beautifully gravelly.

### 2012 Blaufränkisch Ried Johannishöhe +

AEP-101

**CORE-LIST WINE.** I wonder if I've ever tasted a better year of this. Utterly sweet BF aromas, it's as seductive as this cuvée ever gets, with a sweetness and "Pannonian creaminess" (in Georg's words) swirling around the Indonesian black pepper and generous minerality; juicy and long, with an admirably stern finish.

### 2012 Leithaberg Blaufränkisch, 6/750ml (+ +)

AEP-099

Some years ago, a group of about a dozen growers established a club wherein they'd bottle a Pinot Blanc and a Blaufränkisch each year that give primacy to the limestony terroir of the Leitha hillside. This forms a border between Pannonia where we now sit, and the Viennese plain on the north side. So, good, right? A way to celebrate minerality.

Then the wise overlords who've created the whole "DAC" debacle decided that "Leithaberg" would be the DAC for the region. So now I'm not sure how things stand exactly. I only know that Prieler and his fellow members of the original group may use large casks or even used barriques as long as *no flavor of wood* is imparted.

2012 is a dense and brooding vintage for reds. (2011 was explosively ripe and berried, and often too tannic.) I think it will end up better than '11 but we'll need to wait. This wine has iron-y depth but it's stern and aloof. The smaller glass revealed a fabulous minerality. If you drink it this year, decant it two hours out.

*(We tasted a cask-sample of the 2012 BF Marienthal, which won't be bottled this year, but which made me think of Wagyu beef smothered in mushrooms and dark chocolate.)*

### 2011 Blaufränkisch Goldberg, 6/750ml + + (+)

AEP-102

It's the *Le Pin* of Austria. And it's maybe the most expressive young Goldberg I've tasted. I was almost shocked, and then I was glad. The wine isn't cheap, and mostly when you/we taste it young it's opaque—but not this one. Sweet and focused, with billowing sweetness until the finish seizes up and focuses into an endless steel cable of mineral and pepper and *garrigue* stretching past the horizon, getting truffle-y and mysterious in its graphite echoes.

# Heidi Schröck

Neusiedlersee-Hügelland // Rüst

vineyard area // 10 hectares  
annual production // 3,300 cases  
top sites // Vogelsang, Turner  
soil types // eroded primary rock, mica slate, limestone and sandy loam  
grape varieties // 25% Weissburgunder, 25% Welschriesling, 10% Blaufränkisch,  
10% Furmint, 10% Grauburgunder, 10% Zweigelt, 5% Gelber Muskateller,  
5% Sauvignon Blanc



*It is very hard to separate Heidi the person from Heidi the vintner, but of course I do, at the point of tasting. One must.*



If you've met her you were taken with her, and if you know her better you're almost sure to be fond of her. It's just how it is. This year I met her Australian friends Randolph and Anita, whom she hadn't seen in thirty years, since they were all in South Africa together. We looked at pictures, and Heidi was very much the "Austrian lass." She looked adorable, but she looks her best right now. These are her years. A lot of jollity ensued—I might have been responsible for some of it—but at a certain point I sensed my friend Heidi would be grateful for some quiet. Call it introvert radar, though I have no idea whether Heidi's an introvert.

We saw her on a Monday. Rust is nice on Mondays because everything's closed and all the weekend tourists are gone. The storks don't need to pose for pictures, and life is back to normal. We tasted in the usual little room, but Heidi was extremely proud to have built a WC right next to that room, so you don't need to go into the house any more. She was so proud that I used it even though I didn't really need to. I gave it 98 points. In my opinion point scores are best suited for toilets, and the gold standard, of course, are those Japanese contraptions that blow warm air and water on your nether-bits. But I digress.



It was her longest-ever vintage, begun on September 16th and concluded on December 5th. In Rust you make dry whites, dry reds and sweet whites (if you can), and what's good for one type sometimes precludes the others.

Of the many things I love about Heidi Schröck, one is that she's one of the few who really does what so many others only *say* they do—let her wines lead the way. No two Heidi-vintages are the same. She doesn't wrestle her fruit into a shape she has determined in advance. In 2004 when nothing wanted to ferment fully, she made an entire vintage of Halbtrocken wines, anathema in the domestic market (but delicious then as now).

The wines tend to shape-shift, but what they have in common is a kind of tenderness. Burgenland whites are more “horizontal” than the GV's and Rieslings of the Kamptal and its neighbors. They don't have a finicky precision. They're like a really good storyteller who carries you along the narrative even when you wished he'd get to the point, and now you're captured and having fun. If the 2013s are any indicator, Heidi seems to be ever-more comfortable with wine-as-fellow-being instead of wine-as-object-to-“evaluate.” But you need time for those kinds of wines. It helps to be able to daydream. Say you go to the coffee shop and you're gonna finish your project, so you get your booze and set up your laptop, and the next thing you know you're looking out the window at the world going by, and a half hour passes. To me these are *crucial* moments. They are how we relax enough to let the world in. The project can wait. Even if it can't wait, it can just fucking wait. You *needed* to daydream. And you need a

kind of wine that lives right exactly there, in that very consciousness, not a wine that galvanizes your attention so you can “nail” it or score it or tweet about it.

There are ways to make such wines, things you can do in the cellar, but you have to have an Ideal and steer toward it. Creamy texture is helpful. Leesiness is a reassuring flavor, I've always felt. The *breath* of cask (as opposed to the “taste” of wood) is often a soulful thing. The larger point is, it's lovely when wines can address our calmer selves, but we can't hear them if we aren't cultivating (or tolerating) our calmer selves, in which case we are I think a little starved.

I'd love Heidi's wines even if I didn't love Heidi, but I love them even more *because* I love the person who makes them. I know you know what I mean. Any of you who've met Heidi will know exactly what I mean. If you haven't met her, the easiest way to sum her up is to say she's real, and you can talk with her. I mean, what can be more important about a person?

She makes it look easy. Much easier, in fact, than it has been for her. But that's how it is with certain people, and Heidi's one of them. Though she's as lusty and earthy as anyone I know, she doesn't seem to know how not to be graceful. She is one of those very few people who appear to have figured out how to live. She possesses an innate elegance and sweetness. I have no idea what effort this might entail—none, I suspect—but she is naturally conscientious and thoughtful without being at all self-effacing. She invites affection with no discernible effort. Because all she has to do is offer it.

**2013 Weissburgunder +**

AHS-148

Some years these are oyster-shell-y and some years they're more buxom and flowery, but it's best if you can split the difference. This shows a fetching aroma, leesy, acacia, langoustines, the sexiest Pinot Blanc from Heidi in several years; and yet it's a complex being with buzzing limestony mineral and super-pretty fruit, a kind of apple-cellar "sweetness." Please don't drink it too cold.

**2013 Gelber Muskateller**

AHS-147

Just 12% alc in 2013, but as always Heidi's is the baroque Muscat, blossomy rather than catty; linden and orange and chamomile, and even waxy, yet withal it's varietally true, especially on the snappy, clamping finish. Aged four months in acacia on its fine lees. Heidi tastes hibiscus, and we all agree. Are you still a scaredy-cat about Muscat? Start with this one.

**2013 Furmint + +**

AHS-150

This comes very close to the soul of what I do and who I am. Heidi and a few brave souls reintroduced the grape to Austria from Hungary about twenty years ago. It grew there in the old days. There still isn't a lot of it, I think just 8.2 hectares of which Heidi owns ten percent. Late ripening, high acidity, not too easy to grow, able to make dry and sweet wines equally well, and capricious. Sounds like Chenin, right? It's a soul-sister of Chenin, and if you love one you'll love the other too.

It's my **wine of the vintage** because it's the one that felt like it brought me home. There's almost no botrytis. A perfect varietal aroma (rosewater, linden, chamomile, quince), and the palate is like a calm gentle wizard of the mysteries. Think of Montlouis only better; it's sanguine, with mineral as a lingering texture, and the wine is crazily long considering how gently and persistently it sighs in its glowy contentment. Superb by any objective measure, but seen emotionally—the best way to see it—it's the flavor of lullaby and psalm.

**2012 Grauburgunder**

AHS-151

Another fine vintage of maybe my favorite oaky wine; there's smoky Comte-Lafon aromas, a rich palate like a liquid of straw, and a finish like new leather. Two things to observe: oak is best when it's woven in rather than plastered on, and Pinot Gris may be better suited than Chardonnay to this treatment.

**2013 Rosé "Biscaya"**

AHS-146

*Now it can be told!* The varietal blend of this one-of-a-kind Rosé is in fact Lagrein, Teroldego, Petit Verdot, Syrah, Merlot, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon. Try guessing it blind, smart guy. As always it's the most vinous and complex Rosé in my portfolio and perhaps in anyone's; rose-hips, hibiscus, herbs, roasted tomatoes, and serious solid length.

*(There are two other wines you should know about. One is a single-vineyard wine called Ried Vogelsang which was delicious but I wondered if I could sell it, as it's a blend of varieties. The other is a new wine, not even named or priced yet, a "Spätlese" type with moderate sweetness, from Welschriesling and Pinot Blanc, like a junior version of the BA.)*

**2013 Beerenauslese "Selektion," 6/375ml**

AHS-152H

"This was the hard work of November and December," Heidi said. It's Pinot Blanc (and a little Pinot Gris) plus Welschriesling, and it's another steady vintage of a great favorite, a savory-salty-sweet "dessert" wine.

**2012 Ruster Ausbruch "On The Wings Of Dawn," 6/375ml +**

AHS-149H

Well this is how this thing is done! It smells exquisite, waxy, passion fruit and chamomile and osmanthus; a puddingy texture to a wine with a lot of salty grip.

# Sattler

Neusiedlersee // Taden



vineyard area // 15 hectares  
annual production // 5,800 cases  
soil types // gravel with brown earth and sand  
grape varieties // 60% Zweigelt, 30% St. Laurent, 10% Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Weißburgunder (Pinot Blanc), Welschriesling

*My local distributor carries Sattler's basic St. Laurent, so I've been along while it's taken out to show to customers. Most don't know what it is, and suppose it might be all weird and umlaut-y. Until they taste it.*



Then I get to watch the gradual melting away of each successive layer of resistance, as the sumptuous prettiness of the wine completes its seduction. I don't even care if a customer insists on pronouncing it as if it were French—Sawhn Lawhrahnn, instead of the much easier “Zonked Low (like “cow”) Rent”. In fact, here's the handy-dandy mnemonic—it's like “Zonked Cow-Rent” which is of course the stipend paid by a drunken Guernsey when he knocks over your fence.

Everything about this estate is candid and getting more so all the time. There aren't many wines. He knows

what he wants to do, and does it. The wines are getting less oaky as he trusts his fruit more. The Austrian wine press is also noticing, and the wines are prominent among the top performers.

When you start out you have certain wines against which you model your own. You reassure your customers (and yourself) that you can compete with viable wines in the familiar idioms. You are, in other words, guided by a certain timorousness and insecurity. If you can demonstrate your competence at the prevailing style, you comfort yourself, please your customers, and sell some wine.

A lot of growers stop there. They know the right things to say, and they can create a plausible facsimile of a serious wine estate, and the wines are often tasty. But in the end they are dull. Because they have no way to answer the crucial questions: why do you exist? What is yours to say?

Growers who are capable and curious, who actually want to develop, will often find after a few years that they can trust the essential taste of their fruit. And so they adjust their cellar work to favor things that are inherent and downplay that which is applied later. Oak goes from being a bad master to being a good servant. I think this is exactly what's happening at Erich Sattler's tidy little winery.

Sattler is one of the few young growers I know who isn't out to get your attention but instead seeks merely to bring you pleasure. I love these kinds of wines,

as you know. You take the first sip and think "Well sure, O.K., it's clean and pleasant and all, but..." and then the glass is suddenly empty and you barely know why. I could tell you why: it's because the wine *tastes* good and invites you to keep sipping.

Erich Sattler is emblematic of the new generation of Austrian vintners, a wine-school grad, 4th generation in the family, taking over as recently as 1999. "We make wine as my grandfather did," he says, "only with better machines."

But if you're thinking of hanging out with him, think again. Last year as we were leaving the winery he noticed a bung-stopper missing, and lost an entire cask to oxidation. An accident over the winter left him in a wheelchair for four months. He's lost about half of his 2014 crop to hail—already. This is not a lucky guy.

### 2013 Zweigelt Rosé

AST-051

Probably all gone by the time you read this, but it's sleeker and more racy than the '12, yet you still taste the underlying red; it isn't gushy-strawberry but more tart raspberry, almost like Mourvedre Rosé.

### 2013 St Laurent

AST-053

**CORE-LIST WINE.** 12.5% alc. And pure fruit, done entirely in stainless steel. Normally the wine is marrowy and substantive, but this was bottled four days ago and was thus a little sharp. It seemed a bit smoky and cigarish, but impossible to suss until the sweet fruit returns.

### 2013 Zweigelt

AST-054

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Also 12.5% alc. Also four days in bottle, but it's in better shape, sweeter; if it's accurate it will be Zweigelt in the form of liquid violets and blackberries, with underlying cherry-tobacco notes. Again, no wood.

### 2012 St Laurent Reserve + +

AST-052

Cask-sample. Sensationally pretty fragrance, really enticing and seductive, and the wine is richly avuncular rather than blatantly or sweetly oaky. Two-thirds used barriques, in fact. Sophisticated and rich, with a long satisfying finish; reminds me of the '06 or '09 in its beaming warmth, all crusty veal chops smothered with porcinis.

### 2012 Zweigelt Reserve + (+)

AST-055

Bottled late January. The spicy aromas recall Lagrein or Petit Verdot; smoke, black cherries, herbs; agreeable ripe tannin gives grip below all the lavish sweet berry.

# Südburgenland

*A benefit to my working life is that I get to visit people and places I've grown very fond of. I wake up each morning, usually someplace I like, and think "I get to see Heidi today," or "I get to see Ludwig today," and so each morning is full of pleasant anticipation.*



And yet as I made the entirely new drive to an entirely new place, I realized the other kind of excitement, the edgier kind, when you view a foreign place with those keen wondering eyes. What drew me to Südburgenland was of course the promise of the wines, the special Blaufränkisch that comes from those iron-rich volcanic often schisty soils. Nothing else tastes like they do. It was an added bonus that the tiny region entailed a bit of a schlep no matter where you started from. From Vienna, or from Rüst where my colleague and I started, you pass through a lovely chaos of verdant hills called the *Bucklinger Welt*, and then through another few folds of deeply wooded ridges. You can't drive fast. You curve and curve and curve some more. And then suddenly you emerge with the crazily steep Eisenberg hill in front of you, as if someone carved off a slice of the Mosel and plopped it down in a little winky corner right on the border to Hungary. It feels "like a lost world," as Giles MacDonald wrote.

We sat in the tasting room with Reinhold Krutzler and looked across the valley. "The village you see in the foreground, that's in Austria," he said. "The one behind it is in Hungary. When we were kids we'd see the lights from the guard towers, and our parents told us not to play too close to the border because there might be land-mines." The road signs are in both languages. You feel like you could go aground there, if you wanted to hide.

There's a sort of sub-village on the hill above the sleepy village of Deutsch Schützen, called *Weinberg*, which contains all the winery cellars and Heurigen, dotted over the gentle upward roll. Only the Eisenberg itself is dramatic; the rest of the region is gentle and pretty.

There's a local wine specialty called *Uhudler*,

which is actually made from *vitis Labrusca*, but it's the remarkable Blaufränkisch that concerns us here. There are three acknowledged elite growers: Szemes, UweSchiefer, and Krutzler, and supporting them are a host of fine country wine estates, at least one of which—Wallner—is very fine indeed.

As a rule Blaufränkisch likes a heavy soil that holds water and warms slowly. In Mittelburgenland it often grows on loam and clay. Here in Südburgenland there's also loam, but also the unique configuration of iron and schist that gives the wines an almost blatant minerality and a compelling pointed spiciness. Most Blaufränkisch can be called "peppery," but these wines show an abundance of *nuanced* pepper, as though you were conducting tasting of various peppercorns from Indonesia and Sumatra and Madagascar. It's the closest red wine comes to the particular experience of tasting *white* wine, especially if you prize minerality highest among flavors. If really fervid Wachau Grüner Veltliner were red, it would be Eisenberg Blaufränkisch.

I could have fastened myself to the "top" guy and strutted my pride of association. But I wanted to also offer you something hearty and affordable so that you'd have an easier wedge into this region. Krutzler is indeed elite, but such things are appreciated best when they're predicated on a basis. Which makes us ask a new question: how good is that basis, at its best? How good can "good" be?

Thus I overcome my desire to shape this portfolio in the tidiest possible way, and rather than choose between two excellent estates, I offer them both. Ha ha; that sounds so cerebral! In fact I'm just a helpless promiscuous wine slut who can't say no to anything exciting.

# Wallner

Südburgenland // Deutsch-Schützen

vineyard area // 8 hectares

annual production // 2,500 cases

top sites & soil types // **Deutsch-Schützen Weinberg** (profound, medium-weight to heavy loam over slate in deeper layers, some iron oxide); **Eisenberg** (light to medium-weight loam and sand mixed with slate and iron oxide)

grape varieties // 70% **Blaufränkisch**, **Zweigelt** 7%, **St. Laurent** 2% as well as **Cabernet Sauvignon** 5% and **Merlot** 3% (only for the Cuvee); appr. 13% white



*His little brochure has the emblem “echt—typisch—erdig” Genuine, typical, earthy. Sums it right up.*



Gerhard Wallner assumed the estate from his father in 2002, and is up to “a good 7 hectares,” making honest yet polished wine. If you’re tempted to suppose the wines are rustic, believe me they aren’t. Nor are they rough-cut, foursquare or heavy-footed. They’re delicious, extroverted, hearty wines that also convey a lot of finesse. They show all the uniquely spicy character and clarity of the best wines of the region.

Though Wallner grows Zweigelt and St. Laurent (as well as a little Cab and Merlot), the Blaufränkisch is obviously front and center, and it’s the wine I’ll concentrate on. As is my standard practice, I drank the wines at home over a period of months before deciding to visit the estate; I always want to see how a wine *drinks* rather than how it “performs” in a tasting situation. I know myself by now. When a wine is great I sit with my

**Wallner at a glance** // Excellent supplier of juicy and varietally scrupulous wines from a “lost world” in extreme southeastern Austria.

**how the wines taste** // Luscious yet peppery, “rural” but not at all rustic, and lip-smacking drinkable.

chin in my hands and stare at the air, letting its greatness soak in, saying very little. And when a wine is entirely wonderfully *good* I get up and pace the room and mutter to anyone present “Wow, this is farking delicious!” or words to that effect. (I’ll even do it when no one’s present, but you have to take my word.) Wallner will make you smile. Wallner will make you very nearly

laugh out loud. But Wallner will also make you pause at times, because these wines, as happy as they are, are not *jolly* or boisterous.

Gerhard believes in keeping back-vintages around as long as possible, to show what Blaufränkisch is like when out of its infancy. I like his young wines, but I’m going to show you these vintages as long as I possibly can.

## 2011 St Laurent +

AWL-012

Oh now what have I gone and done. I said I’d only offer BF, and this little critter done stole my heart. Surprisingly yummy, done in 500l casks (double the size of barriques), 12.5% alc; enters demure but ends really plummy and porcini-earthy. Aromas of cherries and Corvino, then sour cherries, then marjoram and mushrooms.

## 2008 Blaufränkisch

AWL-011

This cool, long season gives a wine itself precise and *cool*, as if giving a speech it had plenty of time to memorize. Only 12.5% alc, wonderfully! For me it’s the entry wine if you want to understand the variety; silky and deeply berried and showing really focused pepper and mineral. Incisive and hi-def. When it’s gone, we’ll proceed to...

## 2012 Blaufränkisch Eisenberg “DAC”

AWL-013

### 2012 Blaufränkisch Eisenberg “DAC,” 20/375ml

AWL-013H

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE (12/375ml).** It’s still the same entry-level wine but now the region has its “DAC” so there’s another useless thing to have to explain. But the wine, that works. At first the fruit and berry face of BF; then the herbs and pepper emerge, with unusual charm. Call it light and juicy, with the local twang of terroir.

## 2008 Blaufränkisch Reserve +

AWL-002

### 2008 Blaufränkisch Reserve, 20/375ml

AWL-002H

Another pure, howl-at-the-moon BF; precise and precisely my type, Serrano-smoky, truffley, amazingly silky texture, complex and nettley. Buy this one to see what this grape is.

## 2011 Blaufränkisch Reserve (+)

AWL-015

### 2011 Blaufränkisch Reserve, 20/375ml (+)

AWL-015H

### 2011 Blaufränkisch Reserve, 6/1500ml (+)

AWL-015M

In contrast to the keen incisive ’08, this is the sexy-pie face of BF if you want to meet its seductive side, the one that’s overt and generous. The palate is sensationally ripe yet angular, serpentine and twisty; bark and char and nettles into a spice-riven finish.

## 2011 Blaufränkisch “Namenlos” (+)

AWL-019

### 2011 Blaufränkisch “Namenlos,” 6/1500ml (+)

AWL-019M

Wallner makes two *têtes de cuvée*, one called “Kentaur” that has the “international” grapes included, and this one, which is the best he can do from Blaufränkisch.

Very old vines, from 40 to 90, and done in 500-liter casks, we actually drink this while we wait for the 2008 to shed its tannic shroud. This is a young assertive monster, with the aromatic density of meat-crust and *garigue*, and it has tannin of its own to shed, but it’s also meltingly ripe (14%) and “sweet.”

# Krutzler

Südburgenland // Deutsch-Schützen

vineyard area // 10 hectares

annual production // 5,833 cases

top sites & soil types // Deutsch-Schützen Weinberg and Bründlgfangen

(profound, medium-weight to heavy loam over slate in deeper layers, some ironoxide);

Eisenberg (light to medium-weight loam and sand mixed with slate and ironoxide)

grape varieties // Blaufränkisch 84%, Zweigelt 8%, Merlot 3% as well as

Cabernet Sauvignon 2% (only for the Cuvee); 3 % white



*Considering Krutzler is one of the Great Names of Austrian reds, his place is mingy and wee when you drive up to it—or as I did, past it. The contrast between his elevated status and the actual modesty of his digs was quite reassuring and even charming.*



This is a bit of a stretch for me. Krutzler's in a price segment with which we normally generate only moderate numbers. But his are among Austria's very best red wines, and I feel a sense of duty to show you exactly what these wines can do.

Though they are more sophisticated than Wallner's wines, they're by no means anonymously "international."

They have more frequent-flyer miles, one might say. But they do not forget where home is.

And yet when you talk with Reinhold Krutzler about his grape growing or winemaking you find you have almost no "news" to report. Wines like this, regardless of variety or even of color, are always treated the same: grow excellent grapes, not too many of them, pick at

**Krutzler at a glance** // The "top" estate in Südburgenland is among the elite red-wine producers in all of Austria.

**how the wines taste** // Weighty and classy, with more polish and sheen than Wallner's more lusty forthright style. YET: still quintessential Blaufränkisch!

the best possible time, and do very little in the winery. When you read through his brochure his priorities emerge quite clearly. “Fine minerality,” “silky texture,” “The wines exude intense minerality,” “concise, earthy, fruity, sophisticated.” He has found that his best results derive from making small-blend cuvées rather than single-site bottlings. He also identifies the unusually wide swings between day and night temperatures as major contributors to the fervent aromas he seeks.

BF is a high-acid grape in any case. Its analyses would shock you, in fact. I’m all too aware there’s a theory that red wines shouldn’t have high acid, but it is far from the

whole truth. Blaufränkisch *thrives* on its acidity; it makes the wines fresh even when they’re broodingly intense; it gives them the incisive clarity they show at their best.

Krutzler’s is a 10-hectare estate, not very big at all, with three on the Eisenberg. He sells through his wines faster than does Wallner, and usually I’m tasting the newest vintage. This in turn leads me to see the wines as young savages, opaquely intense and markedly tannic and only hinting at the precision and polish they’ll eventually reveal. Yet the best bottle of Austrian red I’ve ever drunk was ’99 Perwolff, so I need to ‘splain why my notes are full of hedges and qualifiers.

## 2013 Blaufränkisch

AKR-012

This was eight days in bottle and completely closed up. Sorry, but what else can I credibly say? There is, by the way, a “superior” version of the base-level wine, a “DAC” from slatier vineyards, and still in cask, that I liked very much. But we’re trying to keep prices attractive.

## 2012 Blaufränkisch Reserve

AKR-013

### 2012 Blaufränkisch Reserve, 12/375ml

AKR-013H

### 2012 Blaufränkisch Reserve, 6/1500ml

AKR-013M

Vines are 25-34 years old, and the wine’s packing: 14% alc. and also in bottle only eight days, but this is alive and showing its Vino Nobile side, still a little aloof, but its sheer weight emerges.

...and then there’s a so-called “Alte Weingarten,” consisting of 42-year vines of BF (75%) and Zweigelt (25%). I didn’t think you’d buy it because there’s no varietal name. But the wine is rich and loamy (no Eisenberg in it), seriously excellent and *present*. Call me if you think I’m too timid.

## 2012 Blaufränkisch Perwolff, 6/750ml + (+)

AKR-016

### 2012 Blaufränkisch Perwolff, 6/375ml + (+)

AKR-016H

### 2012 Blaufränkisch Perwolff, 6/1500ml + (+)

AKR-016M

Remarkably open for a young Perwolff, more than any of the last three vintages; aromas are concentrated cherry, smoke and terroir; the slate is showing as lilac and even resin, and there’s a sweetness vibrating inside it; it’s even slim and lissome given its mass; the finish begins flowery (wisteria) and ends as pepper and graphite.

# Glatzer

Carnuntum // Göttlesbrunn

vineyard area // 54 hectares    annual production // 25,000 cases  
top sites & soil types // Rosenberg, Kräften (calcerous clay);  
Haidacker (gravel, loam and clay); Altenberg (gravel and clay, with high lime content);  
Schüttenberg (sandy loam and gravel); Bärenreise (sandy loam and clay)  
grape varieties // 37% Zweigelt, 17% Blaufränkisch, 12% Grüner Veltliner,  
10% Merlot, 8% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Weissburgunder, 3% Sauvignon Blanc,  
2% St. Laurent, 2% Pinot Noir, 2% Syrah, 2% other



*These are the wines—the only kinds of wines—you actually want to drink after a big day of tasting. They're as soul-satisfying as a steaming bowl of spaghetti; they seem to offer unconditional love. And they're cheaper than therapy!*



Walter Glatzer's doing a smart thing: holding stocks back so as to have 18 months worth of wine in the cellar, which in most cases means two vintages. This is especially good for the reds, which always bulk up with a year in bottle—even the “wee” ones. I discovered a low-fill bottle of Glatzer's '97 GrüVe Dornenvogel buried away in an out-of-the-way case, and thought I'd better drink it. The wine was wonderful, and now I wish I'd kept it! One gets used to seeing Glatzer as a supplier of “useful” white wines to be pounded through and hardly thought about, but this '97 was every bit as good as an entry-level Smaragd from the Wachau—at a third of the price.

Walter Glatzer is a miracle. An amazingly nice guy, making sensational wines and offering them at way down-to-earth prices; this isn't, you know, an everyday occurrence! He's also obsessively motivated to keep improving the wines, which he seems to do annually.

I also want to sing a paen of praise to this man's red wines. He makes them to be drunk and loved, not admired and preened over. He could easily make each of the prevailing mistakes: too much extraction, too astringent, too tannic, too oaky, reaching beyond their grasp. But year-in and year-out these are absolutely *delicious* purring sex-kitten reds.

He's installed two fermenters, one for reds and one for whites, the second of which is kept underground in a newly-built cellar in order to keep fermentation temperatures down. He has 54 hectares of vineyards, from which he aims, like all the young lions, to grow the best possible grapes. He'll green-harvest when necessary, not only to increase dry extract but also to guarantee physiological ripeness. Glatzer does all his harvesting by hand, though he could, if wished, work much of his land by machine.

**Glatzer at a glance** // Along with Ecker these are the best values in this offering. And with steadily increasing quality, especially among the reds. Tight, reductively brilliant whites that should be poured by the glass at every restaurant in the universe!

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner

AGL-177

**CORE-LIST WINE.** These were the final GVs we tasted, and this was the crispest and most peppery of them all, snappy and serpentine.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner “Dornenvogel”

AGL-178

Glatzer’s top wines are named “Thorn Bird” after the avian marauders who like to eat his ripest grapes. 2013 is one of the best vintages of this perennially amazing value; it’s really extra-virginy and shows a fervent peppery richness, salty ore-like minerality and a nuance of licorice.

### 2013 Weissburgunder

AGL-179

Quite full and *marine*, cool mussel and straw; snappy focus but creamy mouthfeel and with excellent length. Pretty serious for a light wine.

### 2013 Sauvignon Blanc

AGL-182

Our numbers show a little vogue has developed for this guy. It’s the currant-leaf and red-pepper face of SB, with length and density for a “basic” wine. It sets up...

### 2013 Sauvignon Blanc Schüttenberg

AGL-183

...which is the single-vineyard one, and if you’d said back twenty years ago when Walter and I got started that one day we’d have two of his Sauv-Blancs to taste I’d have cackled maniacally, or crawled to a corner and whimpered. But lawzy, the wine is good; a tank-sample still on its fine lees, it’s serious business, showing the volcanic twang of Polz’s more famous (and more expensive) “Therese” bottlings. A “sweet” umami but a spicy palate with an almost ramp-like penetration of char and currant. Quite a statement, and worth the trade-up.

### 2013 Zweigelt “Riedencuvée”

AGL-181

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Already in bottle. Fantastically fruity, a bit of *gout de capsule*, and shows Zweigelt’s finishing smokiness—and boy does it finish. For an ostensibly simple wine this packs a lot in.

### 2013 Blaufränkisch

AGL-187

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Cask sample. Like liquid iron, and still a bit tannic. Sawarak black pepper. Some sap in there somewhere, but this is pointed and graphite-y for a Glatzer wine.

### 2012 Pinot Noir

AGL-184

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** This is his best vintage ever of PN; it’s really ripe and juicy with a great suave length; dusty and slightly herbal, improving with each sip. The finish is rare duck, almost mineral; a long light wine that’s truly vinous, not merely fruity.

### 2012 St Laurent

AGL-185

Round and varietal, ripe and generous, roses and plums and the crisp cheesy taters atop the gratin.

### 2012 Zweigelt “Dornenvogel” (+)

AGL-180

An example of 2012 red being dense to a point of near opacity; it needed five good minutes to show aroma, but when it emerged it was big and sexy with swashbuckling fruit, like a *very* ripe-vintage Cab Franc or even VINO Nobile de Montepulciano. Give it an hour in the carafe (or five years in the cellar).

### 2012 Blaufränkisch Reserve +

AGL-186

This is the smiling face of BF, and a really tasty wine; if the variety has a floral side, this is it; the weedy profile is softened into a kind of herbal protein sweetness; broad and muscular but with the pencil-point of the grape.

# Weinviertel

*The “Wine-Quarter” is in fact a disparate region containing more-or-less everything northeast, north or northwest of Vienna that doesn’t fit in to any other region. You can drive a half-hour and not see a single vine, then suddenly be in vineyard land for fifteen minutes before returning to farms and fields again.*



Vines occur wherever conditions favor them; good soils, exposures and microclimates, but it’s anything but what we’d call “wine country.” Which is in fact rather charming, since it doesn’t attract the usual glom of wine-people.

As you know, wine folks descending monolithically upon a region (for whatever good reason) have a salubrious effect on prices if you’re a grower. Thus the quiet Weinviertel is a primo source for *bargains*. With the Dollar in the shithouse, now seemed like a good time to prowl for values.

But if I’m honest there’s more to it than even that. I don’t seem to be much of a pack animal. I tend away from the crowd, even when I appreciate what that crowd is crowding toward. It’s easy to go to the established regions and find excellent wine if you have a fat wallet. It’s too easy. I find I enjoy going somewhere alone and finding diamonds in the rough. Alas, Austria is a wine culture in which one is hardly ever alone. The new man in this offering is on the local radar or I’d never have known of him. The entire Weinviertel is known, as Germany’s Rheinhessen is known—as the up and coming new region, DACs and related nonsense notwithstanding.

This started maybe 15 years ago, when the first wave of young growers applied modern methods and made far better wines than the innocuous plonk which came before. Attention was duly paid. But with repeated exposure

one began to want something the wines weren’t giving. They were certainly “contemporary” enough, all cold-fermented stainless-steel yada yada, but most of them were lacking animus and soul. With the entrance of another wave of young vintners, it began to change.

It needs a certain drive, a kind of urgency to want to endow one’s wines with something more than simple competence. The formula for that is unexceptional, and lots of C-students can do it. And make perfectly decent wine. But certain people ask certain questions: How can I unlock what’s in this land? How do I make imprinted wines that people will remember? Why do it at all if it won’t be wonderful? For someone like this, wine isn’t just a formula or recipe; it’s a matter of anguish and relief and mystery and frustration and delight, it is so dimensional as to be virtually human. The more you live with it, the less you need what you “learned” and the better you hone and hear your intuitions. You can always spot such people because they’re much happier in the vineyards than in the cellar. After all, the cellar is full of machines, but the vineyard is full of life. Surprises are few in the cellar but constant in the vineyard. Talk to your land and your vines for long enough and soon you will know when they answer you back. Every grower like this will tell you he was taught all wrong. “They teach you to act before they show you how to listen.” And in the end their wines become like they themselves are; alive, alert, attuned, questing.

# Schwarzböck

Weinviertel // Hagenbrunn



vineyard area // 24 hectares  
annual production // 15,000 cases  
top sites & soil types // Kirchberg, Sätzen (löss); Aichleiten (flyschgestein with löss); Hölle (flysch)  
grape varieties // 50% Grüner Veltliner, 15% Zweigelt, 10% Gelber Muskateller  
10% Riesling, 5% Merlot, 10% other

*Rudi Schwarzböck assumed control of the winery from his father in 1994, though he says “1997 is really the first vintage I was happy with,” before proceeding to blow my freakin’ mind with an insanely fabulous Riesling from that great vintage. His wife Anita took her share of the reins in 2003, and the two function as a seamless team.*



If I don't go into detail about vineyard or cellar work it's not because I'm short of data, but instead because none of it would surprise you. Most of the really good ones do things a certain way, and I'll need several years of hangin' out time with these good folks before I'll know what lives between the tick and the tock.

Hagenbrunn is virtually at the city-line of Vienna—you'd expect the trams to run out there. Some of the vineyards are on not-insignificant slopes, and most soils are loamy löss, with Riesling being grown in sandstone covered over with löss. Rudi and Anita seem in every sense to be a typical young vintner-couple, but even on first acquaintance I sense something more. Rudi seems just a little bit shy, as if he's more at home in the world of the vines than in the tasting room. His seeming diffidence reminds me of Walter Strub's, in that it reflects less a hesitancy than a modesty built on

knowing there's always more information and you're never done experiencing. I'm eager to know this guy better.

But *how* to describe the wines? Theirs is a silky substance not unlike Gobelsburg, in fact. They're not as creamy as Berger or Setzer; theirs is a more up-front palate dance. They make a quick and delightful impression. Oh just taste them. The wines are all arch and modern but not *only* arch and modern; there's an earthy substance to them also, and boy are they good value.

I never quite know what I'll find here. Rudi's a man I'd call cautious, as long as you don't infer I mean “timid.” He isn't. But he wants to be sure his grapes are ripe, and he calculates risks and benefits carefully. This means that some of his wines are high in alcohol, by my standards, and this is because he won't risk them not being entirely physiologically ripe. So I pace around through them and take the ones that work, and these can differ from year to year.

To continue the digression, I *drink* very few wines over 14%, but I'll make a few available to you here and there, because there's a difference between my subjective Terry-the-private-citizen palate and my Terry-the-wine-merchant palate. There has to be. Even though they overlap 99% of the time, I recognize there are wines I happen to not like because of some silly subjectivity, and to respect both you and the grower, I'll put them in the offering with a candid tasting note. That said, disagreeable wines almost never make it in, and if they do I'll tell you why.

It's easy for me or anyone else to come along and tut-tut over a couple wines that may have gotten away, but you try managing a 23-hectare property with more than 50 different parcels, tough guy.

But none of this was evident among the 2013s. Of course I didn't know that yet, as this was my first visit on the schedule. All of us agreed it was a relief to pick ripe grapes and make wine of normal alcohol, again, at last.

Jon Bonné and I have talked about this, and each of us has written about it. Of course 14% is an arbitrary line. Of course my inhibition (or prohibition) excludes me from wines I might like. But I'll take that chance. Because at (or around) 14%, several things are wont to happen. One is, the wines may show actual alcohol, medicinally or in the form of jalapeño-heat. I don't like these things. But even if they're not there, many wines in that zone show a coarse concentration, which is the opposite of things like finesse or grace. And even if *that* problem is avoided, how do I feel by the second glass? Like I'm tired of that wine, that's how I feel. So obviously, we're all calibrated differently, and maybe my palate's a wuss. But I doubt it. I really do. It's just as plausible to interpret the other guy's palate as just-plain gross. Neither accusation sticks; we just do what works for us.

In any case we were all glad not to have to tiptoe around the land mines of over-alcoholic wines.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner, 1.0 Liter

ASB-049L

The first of what proved to be a yummy vintage for the easy-drinking Liters. Cracked pepper and sorrel, snappy and true. (*Psst; there's 14% 2012 in it to give some oomph.*)

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Vier Gärten

ASB-051

This year's "4 vineyards" sports an aerial 11.5% alc, yet is full of substance and joyfulness. Fervently aromatic and quite a bit of density for its lightness, not to mention a "weirdly" long deliberate finish—"weirdly" in quotes because I didn't (yet) know this would be a common facet of all the '13s.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Sätzen +

ASB-053

It will say "DAC reserve" on the label. A big wine (13.5%) from old vines in deep loess; detailed, complex and fascinating aromas; fennel, bell pepper, fish-skin, day-scallops; earnestly spicy and peppery, the craggy face of GV, with a granitic radicchio tang.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Kirchberg

ASB-054

(tank-sample); a super vintage of a GV that limns the line between oleander Viognier-type ripeness and taut snappy GV pepper. Also an excellent value.

### 2013 Gelber Muskateller

ASB-050

11.5% alc. Some delicate gooseberry but not *unripe*. Dark like ore and nettle; the body is curiously creamy yet superbly dry, not flowery. A curious equipoise between tension and repose.

### 2013 Rosé

ASB-055

Mostly Zweigelt with 40% Cab-Merlot, its lightness is deceptive, and you can drink it year-round. Delicious seductive aroma, all fruits and berries, but the palate is savory and herbal, and clings with quite a bit of substance.

### 2012 Zweigelt vom Bisamberg

ASB-052

Deelish! Sweet cherry and smoke, jam but not "jammy," dark almost Blaufränkisch notes; focused and with a genial intensity; swings between ore and black cherry; voluminous but not fat.

# H.u.M. Hofer

Weinviertel // Auersthal



vineyard area // 20 hectares  
annual production // 16,600 cases  
certification // Bio-Ernte Certified Organic  
top sites & soil types // Freiberg (löss with loam); Kirchlissen (löss with clay)  
grape varieties // 53% Grüner Veltliner, 13% Zweigelt, 9% Riesling,  
8% Welschriesling, 4% St. Laurent, 3% Weissburgunder,  
2% Gelber Muskateller, 8% other

*Auersthal is just barely beyond Vienna's northern suburbs, in a dead-still little wine village.*



It's rather odd to drive there and see lots of wee little oil derricks, but such little oil as Austria produces comes from these parts, deep below the löss. I had either forgotten or had never known the estate was organic; they belong to a group called Bio-Ernte which has standards above the EU guidelines. In speech, by the way, "bio" is pronounced to rhyme with "B.O." which can lead to some drollery as you hear references to "B.O. wine" unless, unlike me, you have left behind your adolescence.

The vineyards lie in a rain-shadow and have to endure hot summers. In fact Hofer plants his

Riesling in a fog-pocket as he gets so little rain. The wines are pressed conventionally (no whole-cluster) with skin contact, and all whites are done in stainless steel.

The wines have a quality of moderation and intelligence; they are clear and reasonable. In "normal" vintages such as '08 and '10 they are exceptionally deft and even charming. In warm years they can flirt with extravagance. They have a kind of firm smoothness that's cool like marble. There are some lovely reds to show you.

So, great wine, amazing value, and certified-organic viticulture? Help me make this lovely man a star!

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner, 1.0 Liter

AHF-061L

This wine took off like a rocket, and we needed to contain it. That's correct; we needed to write *less* business, because it was the only way to sustain quality and to ensure the wine would continue being organic.

In essence the wine is sold out by around June, usually when you read this. It has tended to be the most resinous of our Liters-o-GV, but the '13 is/was markedly rich for its level and is/was pretty and lentilly.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Von den Rieden

AHF-062

**(NEW) CORE-LIST WINE.** After three years of hard-core listing, I couldn't ignore two facts: one, the wine was consistently delightful and two, you seem to have felt the previous core-list GV (Freiberg) was at the wrong price point. So we're trading down in level but not in value, as this is beautifully expressive, lentilly and peppery, lively and archetypal and wonderfully charming. Animated, snappy yet also billowy, spreading outward in a gauze of tastyness.

We have a lot of candidates crawling around the same price segment of the core-list, but only this one's certified organic, and for the Liter customers it answers the question "What else can he do?"

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Kirchlissen +

AHF-064

This *should* be Hofer's best GV, at least in theory, but in most recent vintages it's jumped up well north of 14% alc, and at that level it doesn't so much coat your palate as rap your knuckles. That is not, however, the case in 2013! Sporting a bold, proud 12.5% alc this gorgeous wine, grown on deep loess-loam, is super expressive and peppery; rhubarb and sorrel, and beaming with perfect balance; the best-ever vintage of this, and blessings rain upon him for restraining the alcohol with *no* sacrifice of flavor.

### 2012 Zweigelt, 1.0 Liter

AHF-056L

Perhaps the most *wine-y* of the red Liters (along with Berger's), it's juicy and full of cherry and *gout de capsule*. Perfect of its type, as its many happy customers already know.

### 2011 Zweigelt "Klassik"

AHF-066

Denoting in this instance a near-absence of wood flavors. I'm not anti-oak; it just shouldn't show up where it isn't needed. This has the '11 riot of blackberries and spicy richness, and the typical tannin has softened to a nubby tickle; the finish is bacony, and the wine has a Sangiovese tautness below a gamey pancetta richness.

### 2008 St Laurent

AHF-065

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** Long as he keeps having it, I'm a keep selling it, cuz the wine is beautiful and keeps getting better. It's become Burgundian and entirely delicious, plummy and porcini-ish, and I *guarantee* you it's a "WTF is this?" kind of wine.



vineyard area // 30 hectares  
annual production // 16,700 cases  
top sites & soil types // **Laa, Eichholz** (löss over alluvial gravel and limestone)  
grape varieties // 50% **Grüner Veltliner**, 30% **Roter Veltliner**, with 20% **Riesling**, Pinot Blanc, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Zweigelt and Merlot

*2013 is Setzer's best vintage since I started tasting there.*



I saw them on my first day, when I only had an inkling how the year would be, but as I look back I find myself remembering the many people who told me how relieved they were to not battle high alcohols, to not be forced to choose between physiological ripeness and excessive must-weights, and within all this I started to sense a yearning: *How can we bring this about*, and not wait for nature to do it for us once in a great while? Because growers will make allowances for what they have had to gather, which is understandable, but when they've gathered what they most *wish* to gather, they let you know.

For Setzer 2013 is also a vintage that's easy to grasp, i.e., the wines are self-evidently excellent and you don't need my esoterically refined sensibility to understand them. Which leads to an interesting question.

What *does* happen with the wines in the middle? The ones that aren't rowdy and galvanic, but also not cerebral or arcane? I often call such wines humane, or gracious, or civilized, but that makes it sound like the way you have to act during the first dinner at your girlfriend's parents' house. I receive an actual tactile sense of pleasure from cordial, charming wines, but that's because I insist on

having the time to pause and appreciate them. It does come down to time. Charm is a thing we cultivate.

I feel charm is among the highest aesthetic virtues. In people it denotes an effort of behavior whereby you feel appreciated and cared for. In wine or music it creates a response of palpable delight. I find this feeling more pleasant than many other feelings which seem to have greater prestige. Don't get me wrong; there's a place in me for being knocked out, blown away, stunned, impressed, but I find none of these as exquisitely pleasurable as feeling delighted or charmed. Also, charm is a flexible virtue. Charm can exist in big wines or medium wines or little wines. I also appreciate this virtue because it seems less reducible to recipe: any grower of unexceptionable talent can make intense wine. It seems much more intuitive to craft wines of charm, less a matter of formula than of constant attending to tiny details. And knowing all the while that your wine won't be the biggest, boldest, loudest rock-em sock-em wine on the table. But it will insinuate, will crawl inside a certain temperament and sing its siren song, and this is the pleasure for which we live.

Hans and Uli Setzer are a husband-wife team of wine-

school grads maintaining a winery imbued with intelligence and purpose. I was surprised how close they were to the Kamptal and Kremstal (15 minutes from Berger or Gobelsburg) and wondered why Hohenwarth was banished to the lowly Weinviertel. Hans pointed out to me Hohenwarth sits at the same altitude as the summit of the Heiligenstein, thus essentially different from the more

sheltered Kamptal. Nor does it have the pure löss terraces of the Kremstal or even the neighboring Wagram.

Though Setzer was a discovery for me, the estate is conspicuously successful, exporting to three continents and showing up on many of the top wine lists inside Austria, not to mention being a sort of house-estate for the Vienna Symphoniker orchestra.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner, 1.0 Liter

ASZ-063L

Light, snappy and true. I wrote the same last year! It's salty, with '13's delayed-action finish, and a touch of almond.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner "Vesper"

ASZ-066

The lightest of Hans' GV's is captivatingly tasty this year, like a little semolina dumpling; generous aromas, Madagascar peppers; the palate is markedly dense and plump, with a spine of acidity like a wine from the 90s. All of 11.5% alc, and all that flavor...

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner "Die Lage" + +

ASZ-064

Why not just name "Die Lage" (the vineyard)? Because its name is *Eichholz* (Oakwood), which could confuse customers into supposing the wine has oak flavors, which it doesn't. In any case, it's the best vintage of this wine for many years and is a short-listener for sure. Ripe, firm, generous in a muscular form, with a great salty spine; vetiver and flowering field and then a crusty minerality that recalls Renner, or Ott's Stein.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner "8000," 6/750ml + (+)

ASZ-067

From a vineyard (called *Laa*) with especially dense vine-planting, the idea being to stress each individual vine to force its roots to go deep in search of water.

With a demure 13.7% alc it doesn't—blessedly and lately, rarely—overreach. And don't use an over-wide glass, as this generous leviathan needs a form and an outline; it has all the intensity it *could* have. The wine can be like a white Graves in its sense of Semillon creaminess, but this beast tastes like you put coarse salt, whole peppercorns and allspice in a pestle and ground the crap out of it. There's also that wet-cereal sweetness. If you're an *amateur* of the Kamptal, this is the Ried Grub of the Weinviertel.

### 2013 Roter Veltliner Kreimelberg +

ASZ-068

Depending on whom you ask, this is either an ampelographic cousin of GV or it's not related at all. It's named not for the color of the ripe skins but rather the leaves as the grapes ripen. If you took GV and tamped down its citrus side and tamped up the shiitake and roasted red pepper side, this is what you'd get.

Setzer is one of its grail-keepers. The vineyard is 43 years old. 2013 is the best vintage I've tasted. Roasted orange-peppers, basswood and lemon; extravagantly juicy, trumpet mushrooms, dried apricot, brown butter and parsnip, and loads of secret sweetness.

### 2013 Riesling

ASZ-069

More chartreuse and wintergreen, less apricot than the typical Austrian Riesling; it smells actually "German" in a good way; also exotic and incense-y, like a mini-Heiligenstein, really billowing with air; complex and savory, sour-flower (hyacinth and iris); a really original Riesling you need a new vocabulary for.

### 2012 Zweigelt

ASZ-065

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** A winsome and sweet-natured wine, right-bank Bordeaux as usual, stylish, complex and avuncular; a second wave of tertiary sweetness to an affectionate civilized wine; not the usual pizza and meatballs Zweigelt but more a rack-of-lamb wine, with its jus and suggestion of rosemary.

# Wagram

*The road from Vienna northwest to Krems is probably the only boring country road in all of Austria. It follows the flood plain of the Danube, and is dead-flat. About half way along, you notice little hills to your right about 5 miles in the distance. These are the löss terraces of the WAGRAM. Nearing Krems, the terraces draw closer and you're in the Kremstal, while directly ahead the dramatic hills of the Wachau beckon.*



The löss hills of the Wagram are said to be unique in Europe for their depth, up to twenty meters (65 feet) in places. Wagram's the löss leader har har har. But the sandy-loamy ground is so thick that vintners can dig cellars in it without joists, yet this same soil is amazingly porous. This is ideal soil for GrüVe, and where it changes to red gravel or primary rock the vine changes to Riesling or Sauvignon Blanc. Vineyards are mostly on terraces or gentle slopes,

facing south, far enough from the river to avoid botrytis in most years.

Can you taste it? I can't, at any rate. I am certain I couldn't identify any flavor markers for "Wagram" per se. The wines resemble Kremstal wines to me, at least those nearer the Danube and also grown on löss. Still, they had to call it something, and "Wagram" does sound like one of the bad-guys from Lord Of The Rings.

vineyard area // 20 hectares

annual production // 11,600 cases

top sites & soil types // **Steinberg** (weathered primary rock);

**Schloßberg, Im Wasn, Mitterberg** (löss); **Mordthal** (löss with high lime content)

grape varieties // 50% Grüner Veltliner, 15% Zweigelt, 12% Roter Veltliner,

5% Riesling, 5% St. Laurent, 5% Weißburgunder, 4% Sauvignon Blanc,

4% Gelber Muskateller



*Please read this slightly longer-than-usual text, because in the course of talking about Bernhard Ecker and his remarkably lovely wines, I find I need to say something about this “dialect” of wine, and it’s something I think you need to hear, as a counterpoint to what you’re hearing from the naturalistas.*



Not an argument *against* them, but the other side of the yin-yang.

This is “modern” wine at its very best. And I’m willing to understand feeling defensive about deploying a word like “modern,” because I agree we should be wary; too many times modern wines are simply denuded and clinical. Yet we should also be wary of being too precious about what we’d call “traditional” wines. It takes a degree of discernment to distinguish their true virtues from the ones we ourselves *like* to make out of their flaws.

I like every single wine I taste here. I like their exceptional clarity, their incisive detail, their high-definition obsessive nuance, their fresh vitality, and most of all I love their charm and deliciousness. It’s not the same sort of charm we see in Setzer, whose wines are more cashmere-textured, but it is something of great good humor that elevates the wines from mere correctness. I don’t want all wines to be modern as these are, but I want all *MODERN* wines to have the animation and soul I taste here.

“Soul” may seem like an odd word to use to talk about cultured-yeast cold-fermented stainless-steel wines, especially if you’re into “natural” wines where you’ve come to equate soul with something else. But soul is more complex than that. And it lives where it lives, not where we assume it lives.

I sit tasting the wines, suffused with pleasure, and find myself wondering “Who would reject these wines out of hand, on what principle, and to what end?” I feel acutely sad that a person would exclude himself from this form of happiness. There is no dichotomy between wines like these and the special syntax of “natural” wines unless we insist there is. And if we do, we’re excluding another valid species of beauty for reasons I don’t think stand up. Either that, or I’m greedy and I don’t *want* to have to choose. I want them both.

I find soul in these wines because something in them ignites something in me. I taste plenty of modern, competent wine that does the “job” and leaves nothing behind. Not these. Delight lives in these. Clarity I think is

a positive value. Clear pure fruit and mineral density and thirst-inducing fragrance are all positive values. There’s nothing contrived or plausible about such wines, and even the phrase “such wines” is misleading because there are *very* few such wines.

I think it boils down to this: it’s not smart to think that only tertiary, vinous wines can ever be “natural” or have animus. They breathe their particular breath, those wines, and I love them just as you do. But I also love the primary, because I think it takes a special kind of passion to want the drinker to see virginal fruit and terroir so brilliantly. Apart from which, soul is a thing that opens and dilates, and if we ourselves insist that wines like Ecker’s are clinical, then we’re closing off an avenue of bliss, and our souls are wounded.

Don’t be misled by the paucity of plusses. Every single one of these wines will offer you such delight as you rarely taste, at astonishingly gentle prices, and they are honest gleaming thirsty-for-more wines, the kind you can’t believe the bottle is empty *already*.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner, 1.0 Liter

AEC-069L

Though I place it first, he shows it last, after the mighty Mordthal, and not as a “re-set the palate” wine, but because WTF, if the wine works then it works whenever and wherever it’s placed. It’s light, charming, spritzzy and perfect.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Von Stokstal

AEC-075

The “little” one is big-delicious, a portrait in loess, just 12% alc in this frisky GV puppy; snappy but with substance.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Steinberg +

AEC-074

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** In shaping this offering I often pass this wine by, but not in 2013; it’s too good. Utter ivy and bay leaf and wonderful minerality, a primary-rock GV at its most ridiculously charming. High-elevation (330 meters) and old-ish vines (30 years).

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Schlossberg +

AEC-071

Does a role-reversal in 2013, and is curiously more *strict* than Steinberg, though it’s grown on pure loess; minerally, hay-and-straw, wheat-and-rye; all kinds of flavors that aren’t flowers or fruits but are charming and pointed. This wine is a regular denizen of my cellar.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Mordthal + (+)

AEC-076

Old vines (over 50) from one of the Wagram’s Grand Crus, the wine sees time in steamed acacia casks, more neutral but also more porous than oak. You’ll get tired of this trope, but here again, a wine that’s usually too much of a good thing is just the *right* amount of a good thing in 2013. Complex aromas of smoke, melon and rhubarb; alc 13.6, with swollen minerality and rhubarb-y sweetness; brightness, grip; cardamom and mint; transparent but jammed with substance, into a finish of woodruff and lime.



### 2013 Roter Veltliner Steinberg

AEC-077

This won first prize as the Wagram's best Roter Veltliner. It's a stern, serious wine, true to the variety, full of "purple" flavors (iris, lavender, lilac) but also of course roasted peppers and mushrooms, into an herbal smoky finish.

The Austrians don't talk about dry extract as the Germans do, but I was amazed to hear this wine had 31 g/l—which is really high. Inquiries shall be made...

### 2013 Gelber Muskateller

AEC-070

Oddly not the most euphoric vintage of this. It's true to the grape but curiously miserly, with an unripe currant-leaf note. Normally a wine I expect to adore—maybe I caught it on a bad day?

### 2013 Riesling

AEC-072

A whole lot of stone-fruits! Charmingly aromatic; direct, fresh and fetching—as goes the wine. Like taking spearmint, extracting the sweetness and leaving the snappy bite behind.

### 2013 Zweigelt, 1.0 Liter

AEC-078L

*Pretty* color; gushy primary fruit aromas; a taut fruity red, the kind no one makes any more, like a cuvée of Gamay and Tempranillo. Hot weather, burgers and ribs, can't find a glass? Drink it from the damn bottle!

### 2011 Zweigelt "Tradition"

AEC-058

Explosive, like a fireworks of blackberries. You get three mouths-full for every sip.

### 2009 St Laurent

AEC-059

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** This is purely and simply delicious! Silky, generous and easy going; blueberry on top and roast beef jus on the bottom.



vineyard area // 28 hectares  
 certification // RESPEKT  
 annual production // 25,000 cases  
 top sites // Feuersbrunner Spiegel, Feuresbrunner Rosenberg, Engabrunner Stein  
 soil types // loess, Gföhler gneiss, sand, chalk, and red gravel  
 grape varieties // 90% Grüner Veltliner, 10% Riesling

*Many of you know the estate through the various importers with whom they used to work, and in one instance (Valley View in California) still do. Certainly the label is instantly recognizable, as well as being graphically brilliant. And certainly the wines are outstanding.*



With Ott you can't possibly divest the person and the wines from each other. You represent him as much as you do them.

This is no small property: 32 hectares plus another 6 ha he buys from another organic grower. Ott, as you know, is organic, and he also does certain bio-dynamic practices though not under the Demeter auspices. A number of growers (including Hannes Hirsch) all started transit to bio-d at the same time—safety in numbers—

but for various reasons they ended up creating a group of their own, called “RESPEKT.”

His first vintage was 1993, at the age of 21, but the estate he inherited was already in the green vanguard, having stopped chemical fertilizers as early as 1971.

Ott is most renowned for Veltliners, correctly, but there's also a little Sauvignon Blanc and two Rieslings, one traditionally dry and another made in the German idiom as a lower-alcohol wine with some residual sugar.

**Ott at a glance** // Enormously consequential estate, especially as a Lama of Grüner Veltliner.

**how the wines taste** // Not heavy, but weighty. Not fat, but corpulent. Not creamy, but substantive. Imagine the polar opposite of, say, Nigl. These are analogue and warm-feeling, even when they're lithe and structured. Quite particular in site delineation, and highly redolent of not only “terroir” but also of landscape.

One final, grateful word is in order. I had some concern that by taking Ott on, I might be creating instability in my existing portfolio due to internal competition. So I asked the potentially affected growers to tell me how they felt. To a man, they all gave their blessings. “He’s a friend, we know him, it’d be good for you both, we think it’s lovely...” I was, and remain, very moved by this.

Bernhard was proud of his newest building project, living quarters for his workers. It’s a very holistic enterprise, almost like a commune in some ways. I don’t know anywhere quite like it in Austria, nor any Austrian wines quite like these. Only the Grand Cru *Stein* speaks a dialect it feels like I’ve heard before, though it’s spoken virtuosically. When you drink these wines you feel like you’re participating in something, not just consuming flavor.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Am Berg

AOT-029

**CORE LIST WINE.** Bernhard’s entry-level GV is ludicrously good in 2013, partly because of the vintage but also because he controlled all the grape-sellers vineyards for the first time, and picked them by hand with his own team. It’s sensationally juicy and rich, not in ripeness but in substance. I found I couldn’t spit it, however manfully I tried.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner “Fass 4” +

AOT-030

Salty and herbal pork crackling or the skin of the roast; rose hips and rhubarb; the plus is for sheer torque and force, and the wine has the absurd happiness of a great rock song.

*(Some will note the absence of “Der Ott,” which was the next wine in the series. It went the way of so many mid-tier wines, not cheap enough for the “value” buyer and not august enough for the guy who only wants The Best. He still makes it, but you didn’t buy it. Tell me if you want some.)*

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Spiegel, 6/750ml + (+)

AOT-033

The highest elevation among Ott’s three Grand Crus, thus the coolest and breeziest. The soil is gravel over conglomerates. This ’13 is salty and pheasant-y like a *sous-vide* breast with Burgundy truffle; esoteric spices and tropical fruit and parsnip chips; markedly ripe and concentrated.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Stein, 6/750ml + +

AOT-034

The subsoil is the so-called Gföhler gneiss (such as is in the Gaisberg, for example) with a sandy-loessy topsoil.

Bernhard leased the vineyard in 2006, as part of a growth phase. The owner watched him working in the vineyard, and was so impressed by the way he cared for the soil, she offered to sell it to him for “any price you want to pay.” I heard that story and had to blink a few times...

Complex aromas, like a quarry of mineral; a firm, stand-at-attention GV, intense and cool but wonderfully expressive, not aloof; basmati and corn, something leafy, lemon and mint, a liquid Ricola drop; herbs and stones and grains.

Technically in the Kamptal, by the way.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Rosenberg, 6/750ml + (+)

AOT-035

The exegesis of loess here. Wet cereal, polenta and honey and buttery scrambled eggs; it has an imposing salty force, *pure* power, not just the alcohol-facsimile of power; eucalyptus and ginger; a vibrating mass of ur-salt, magma; a singular vintage of this GV icon.

### 2013 Riesling Vom Roter Schotter +

AOT-032

Just when you think you’ve tasted every kind of Riesling there is...

An allusive wine with a dispersed attack, flanking the palate from the sides but then swelling into a wave-like crescendo leading into a long salty-earthy finish like chewing the terroir with a slice of wild-boar ham; notes of juniper and quince.

# Kremstal & Kamptal

These two regions used to make up one region called Kamptal Donauland—but no more. I'm sure someone had a very good reason for the change! The regions are now named for the particular valleys of the little streams Krems and Kamp, and I'll just obediently organize them that way.

Austria's best values are coming from the Kamp and Kremstals. This doesn't mean the cheapest wines; it means the lowest available prices for *stellar* wines. Austria is often paradoxical in that the more you pay the better the value, e.g., the top Kremstal/Kamptal Grüner Veltliners seem to provide more quality than *any* other white wine the same money would buy. This may be partly due to the giant shadow cast by the neighboring Wachau, and the determination of the best Kampers and Kremsters to strut their stuff. For the price of really middling Federspiel from a "name" estate in the Wachau you can get nearly stellar quality in Kammern or Langenlois, and the absolute best from a Nigl or a Gobelsburg is substantially less expensive than their Wachau counterparts. And, every single bit as good. Other than the profound individuality of certain sites (Heiligenstein comes first to mind) there's little of regional "style" to distinguish these wines from Wachau wines. In fact Willi Bründlmayer told me all three regions were once one big region called WACHAU. Ludwig Hiedler points out Langenlois is warmer than anywhere in the Wachau, and he believes his wines need even more time than theirs do.

I had a rather subversive conversation with a Kremstal grower one year, as part of our mutual lamenting of the "DAC" silliness. He said "I'm not really all that sure why we need all these *regions* at all; Kremstal, Kamptal, Traisental, Wagram... are they really so different?" Well wow. I don't often hear growers speaking so blasphemously. It sort of made my mind reel. *You know, I said, even the Kremstal is senseless as a single region; the valley itself is one thing but it's very different from the löss terraces along the Danube in terms of exposure and microclimate*, to which he agreed. You can make a case for the Wachau between Dürnstein and Spitz, i.e., the gorge, because that area has singular characteristics. But I'm not entirely sure how the consumer benefits from having so many different regions whose wines aren't that different from one another. I rather think these things are done by bureaucrats and marketing folks, because they get a kick out of categorizing. Yet a *true* breakdown of these places based on soil, exposure and microclimate would look very different than the currently demarcated regions.

## NOTES ON GAISBERG AND HEILIGENSTEIN

We get to see Heiligenstein from Bründlmayer, and then we'll consider it again along with its next-door neighbor

Gaisberg from Schloss Gobelsburg, Ludwig Hiedler and Johannes Hirsch. That might look redundant, but these are two sites equivalent to Chambertin and Clos de Bèze and if *you* had three suppliers with parcels in *both* sites, you *wouldn't* offer them? C'mon now!

These are the preeminent Riesling Grand Crus of the Kamptal, and they stand among the greatest land on earth in which Riesling is planted. They're contiguous hillsides, each the lower slopes of the Mannhart-hills, but they're dissimilar in crucial ways. Heiligenstein is higher and broader-shouldered (thanks to Peter Schleimer for that image), and probably just the slightest bit warmer. Soils differ also—Gaisberg is crystalline, a soil type the Austrians call "Gföhler Gneiss" which you'll hear the Wachauers talk about also. It's granitic in origin, containing the so-called *Glimmerschiefer* ("gleaming slate") which is essentially fractured granite or schist containing little flecks of silica or mica which sparkle in the sun.

Gaisberg is the type of site wherein Riesling feels inherent, as if neither culminates without the voice of the other. It gives highly *Rieslingy* Rieslings. Slim in body, brilliant in berried and mineral nuance, on the "cool" side of the spectrum.

Heiligenstein's soil is said to be unique; so-called Zöbinger Perm, a sedimentary sandstone-conglomerate from the late Paleozoic Age, also containing fine sand and gleaming slatey clays. The site is too steep to have collected löss. The wines of this astounding vineyard are clearly profound, though more "difficult" and temperamental than Gaisberg's. Great Heiligenstein contains an improbable conciliation of ostensibly disparate elements: citrus-tart against citrus-sweet (lime against papaya), herbal against pitted fruit (woodruff against nectarine), cool against warm (green tea against roasted beets). The wines are more capacious than Gaisberg's, yet not as entirely brilliant; they have more stomach, they are tenors or altos when Gaisberg are sopranos.

Which is the better vineyard, you ask? *Yes*, I answer.

Indeed if Riesling got the respect it deserved, both sites would be studied as obsessively and in such detail as great vineyards in the Côte d'Or. And if the sky fell we would all catch sparrows. But two things bear mentioning. First, both vineyards (but especially Heiligenstein) have different exposures as they follow the mountainside, and there are distinctions between, say, Zöbinger Heiligenstein and Kammerner Heiligenstein. Second, these sites have many proprietors, and while you can't make mundane wine from either of them, there's unexceptional stuff to be found. Of course, in pages other than these...

vineyard area // 18 hectares  
 annual production // 20,000 cases  
 top sites & soil types // **Gebling** (löss and gravelly löss); **Steingraben** (clay-marl-löss rock); **Leithen** (löss and rock); **Haid** (deep brown earth)  
 grape varieties // 70% **Grüner Veltliner**, 15% **Zweigelt**, 9% **Riesling**, 5% **Chardonnay**, **Malvasier**, **Cabernet Franc** and **Welschriesling**, 1% **Gelber Muskateller**



*Berger's GrüVe liter is the wine we sell the most of, and at this point it could almost coast. Almost.*



But the crucial tiny membrane between almost and never is something I never need to worry about. Erich won't forget it. It isn't in his makeup. I can see each year how serious he is to ensure this wine is still performing for me. I mean, it's a modest wine he can't make more than pennies on, yet he cares about it because he's made of caring. I'm moved by the humble decency of taking care that this little wine is still good, is always still good. It takes just as much caring as it does to ensure a great wine is indeed great. But the difference is that everyone notices the great wines; you get trophies and awards and 'tout le monde' wants to buy you a beer. Here your caring goes un-remarked upon.

I suddenly remembered a thing I hadn't thought of in years. Once I was at a carwash that did some detailing of the outsides and insides, and as I was waiting for my decidedly cheap-ass car, I observed all the very nice expensive cars the guys were working on. But they took the *same* care with my funky beat up Accord hatchback as they did with the Caddies and BMWs, and I was extremely impressed. "Thanks for respecting even *my* crappy car," I

said. "Just doin' it right," they said.

That's it: just doin' it right.

So while I am very proud and happy to offer and sell this Liter wine, I have to wonder why so few of its customers are curious to see what else Erich can do. "If this wine is *this* good then how must the better wines be? They don't cost all that much more..."

I wrote in some detail about Erich in my book, because his choices fascinate me. In short, I'm sure we'd agree that ambition is what drives the quality-minded vintner. He wants to make exciting wines that get attention. But what drives the vintner who just wants to make delicious wines that make people happy? That's what I don't understand.

And I would stake this claim; if you buy wine for **practical** reasons, not simply to have "nothing but 90+!!" on your shelves or wine-list, you must pay attention to the *quality*, the *loveliness* of the flavors of the wines you choose. Any clod can buy and sell BIG-ASS wines. Show reserves, wines for the tasting room. I want to sell you wines for FOOD and LIFE. Berger's wines are delightful and affordable. 'Nuff said?

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner, 1.0 Liter

ABG-135L

I wish you could have seen how crestfallen Erich was when we spotted a quality-control issue with one of the bottling lots of the 2012. Not only was he sorry to have inconvenienced me, he was concerned my trust could be eroded. That could never happen.

The problem is solved, and we move into this delightful 2013, which is healthy, lush, yummy and perfect. Future bottlings will move over to screw-caps (from crown corks), so don't be concerned. Do be aware that we aren't going to force the production of this wine to satisfy a volume demand. We're going to get as much wine as is consistent with maintaining the *best possible quality*, and that means we might run short.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Loessterassen +

ABG-137

**(NEW) CORE-LIST WINE.** I've wanted to do this a long time. This wine is an archetype of the terraces sites of the section of Kremstal near the Danube. It is always delicious. It's Erich's best seller. It represents both him and his region perfectly, it tastes wonderful and it's a classic. This '13 is super-charming with typical lentil-sorrel notes, lovely filigree minerality and excellent grip.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Gebling +

ABG-138

Ostensibly Erich's "top" GV, like many such wines it does best in less ripe years, and this one's the loveliest since the 2009. It's a generous beast, salty and friendly; euphoric aromas; a stony firm palate with all the sweet-straw wet-cereal "sweetness" of ripe GV.

### 2013 Riesling Spiegel +

ABG-139

"I'm curious to know what you'll think of this."

I think it's a fantastic juicy Mirabelle-y Riesling that seems to have done 100% malo, but only shows it by an overt pitted-fruit flavor and not by diacetyl. None of us guess it. The wine is generous and spicy and really easy to love—and has 9.2 grams of RS. Why is that important? First because it tastes good, but even more because he could easily have adjusted it to the E.U. limit for "Trocken," which is 9.0 grams, but bless him, he doesn't care. He likes the wine as it is! I'd have kissed him on the lips, except I'm such a manly man.

### 2013 Riesling Steingraben +

ABG-140

Sheesh, what a vintage here! This sometimes sultry wine is perfect in '13, charming and scrupulous; spicy ore-like aroma; piney with a bit of nettle and funky iris; pointed but focused, not sharp; marjoram and lovage and a sapid, stony finish.

### 2013 Gelber Muskateller

ABG-136

**HARD-CORE LIST WINE.** The best of the bunch in this year's Muscats. It's moderate somehow, flowery and not catty, and the spicy grapiness is embedded in an overriding creaminess that's almost pulpy, and almost elegant. Elegance plays infrequently among Muscat's many virtues. I suspect a kinky side may yet emerge.

### 2012 Zweigelt, 1.0 Liter

ABG-142L

It's round fresh and juicy with a sense of raw bacon; excellent quality in its echelon. The '12 will be plumper and more Pinot-like, with fewer heaping berries.

### 2012 Blauer Zweigelt Haid

ABG-141

"Blauer" Zweigelt is just the full ampelographical name. The wine isn't blue. It does show '12's tendency for a kind of translucence and a Pinot-y profile, but there's a surprising jolt of bacony richness at the end. Round, dense, almost brooding, certainly vinous, it seems like a jaguar, waiting quietly to pounce.

vineyard area // 25 hectares  
 annual production // 25,000 - 30,000 cases  
 top sites & soil types // Senftenberger Pellingen, Hochäcker (mica slate, slate)  
 grape varieties // 40% Grüner Veltliner, 40% Riesling, 5% Sauvignon Blanc,  
 5% Gelber Muskateller, 10% other varieties



*If Nigl had a “golden age” it was probably the decade of the 90s, when each vintage felt guided by a steady hand, and difficult years (96, 98) were easily surmounted. Nigl’s the guy you’d have wanted to do your brain surgery, his wines were always so incisive and scalpel-fine.*



And great vintages were abundant; 90 itself, and also 93, 95 (when he was among the very best in all of Austria), 97 and 99.

It’s not that things went kaput in 2000. They just changed. The estate added land, they started building the hotel and restaurant, and a few of the wines went a little rogue. In hot vintages (03, 06) one started to encounter

alcohol-bombs, which seemed at odds with Martin Nigl’s keen chiseled style. I continued selecting to find “his” kinds of wines, which always were there to be found, but I had to audition them now.

In 2013 we see a vintage so perfectly aligned with what Nigl’s wines essentially are, it’s as though Martin had written its script. Or perhaps the gods tapped him on the

**Nigl at a glance** // No one would deny this estate’s inclusion among the absolute elite in Austria, and many observers wonder if there’s anyone finer. Extraordinarily transparent, filigree, crystalline, mineral-drenched wines of mind-boggling clarity. Prices remarkably sane for world-class great Rieslings (compare to the best in Alsace!)



shoulder at the start of the harvest, saying “Take it easy; this year everything will be perfect for you.” And so I sat at the tasting table with a beaming Mr. Nigl, remembering what it was like to taste a vintage where *everything* was superb, in just *his* particular way.

You’d expect these wines to come from a bespeckled gentleman with finely chiseled features, who speaks deliberately and cultivates a side study of medieval jurisprudence. That, or some sort of monk-savant. But no, these almost eerily searching wines hail from a hearty unpretentious country fella. When you meet Ludwig Hiedler you feel a total unity between human and wine, but with Nigl all you can feel is perplexity.

It is tempting to see Nigl’s wines as objects to be examined, because they are so digitally precise that attending to them in minute detail seems like the most appropriate response. People who enjoy High-Def explicit complexity are made ecstatic with these pixilated and eerily expressive wines. As am I.

But lately I have been making myself *drink* them just as though they were ordinary beverages, because I want to see what kinds of *lives* they live when they’re not wine-specimens we examine delightedly. And I’ve discovered that what they need is time, ambience, and food. Not because they are imbalanced (the usual bromide for crummy wine is “Oh it needs food,” to which the only proper response is “No, it needs to be better wine.”) but because they exist in the sensual world, and they are more useful than we think.

A ’97 Riesling Privat I drank a few weeks ago was both breathtaking and superb with the greeny-salady dish on the table. At Nigl’s own restaurant—very good these

days, by the way—I have not once felt the wines were too refined, at least not for *my* schnitzel. I do think they favor fine food, as they themselves are cut fine and not robust. I do think they tend to run cerebral, and are best suited to occasions where they can receive your absorbed attention. I do like them best in warmer weather, because their ultraviolet coolness is refreshing.

Theirs is a penumbral or spectral sort of beauty, around the edges of which is something invisible, like radio waves, the vinous equivalent of molecular cuisine; you feel neural pathways firing as you taste them. But in his own establishment the food is what I’d call country-traditional with unusual respect for ingredients and everything from scratch. It was dysphasic drinking these keen ultraviolet wines with a big ol’ plate of noodles with morels and sweetbreads, but it showed me something. As otherworldly as they sometimes can appear, with food they snuggle right up as all good wines do.

The Krems valley has a climate rather like that of the western Wachau. “During the ripening season we get oxygen-rich, cool breezes in the valley,” says the Nigl price list. “Therefore we have wide temperature spreads between day and night, as well as high humidity and often morning fog. These give our wines their spiciness and finesse. Another secret for the locally typical bouquets and the elegant acids of our wines is the weathered urgestein soils, which warm quickly.”

Only natural yeasts are used to ferment in temperature-controlled tanks. He doesn’t chaptalize and his musts settle by gravity; after fermentation the wines are racked twice, never fined, and bottled—as I once saw—first thing in the morning while they and the ambient

temperatures are cool. What he gets for his troubles are wines with a high, keening brilliance and with an amazing density of mineral extract which can leave an almost salty finish on the palate, as though an **actual** mineral residue were left there.

There is other news. Martin has bought an estate in the Kamptal, called Leindl. It's no small matter, with 20 hectares, and it will entail some replanting—they had Welschriesling in the Heiligenstein, and a lot of red varieties everywhere. Georg Leindl and Martin are making the wines together, at Nigl, which has the capacity and know-how to manage it.

The notion of Nigl making Kamptal wines is intriguing enough, and I liked most of what I tasted among the '13s, though it was rather tough sledding against Martin's best vintage in 15 years. But I couldn't just jump in and do it. First, you don't make such decisions based on one vintage, especially not a superb vintage, and second, I wasn't looking for a fifth Kamptal grower.

There were four wines I'd have selected, had I been selecting. Prices are aggressive. Ask me about them if you're interested in something under the radar. I can't keep Martin waiting forever, but he'll give me a year or two.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Freiheit

AFN-228

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Insanely pretty fragrance! Loessy, wet-cereal; elegant and virtually perfect palate; light (11.5%), focused, graceful and refined, and just a little "cool." Exactly as I like 'em. 2013 is wonderful across the board, but especially kind to loess-grown Veltliners.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Senftenberger Piri +

AFN-231

Spicy, mustard-green mizuna snap; a studious and comely wine; really, this fragrance is re-donk-u-lous, and the wine is insanely beautiful, with its equipoise of repose and spiciness. Piri tends to be the lost "middle-child" of the collection, but I don't how one walks away from a wine as fastidiously detailed and hauntingly pretty as this.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Alte Reben + +

AFN-233

Oh boy... a dream fragrance, a bliss fragrance...the palate is dense but weightless, grace and serenity cloaked over the cool white shoulders of firm yet supple structure. Loessy sweetness but also loessy pepper. Vaporously long. This is the best Alte Reben in at least a decade.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Rehberger Zwettl +

AFN-238

Believe me, at this point I'm looking for reasons not to offer a wine. No one likes clutter. But you know, the moment I can walk away from a wine like this is the moment I walk away from this profession, because then the fire's gone.

Martin obtained this vineyard in 1999 but needed to replant, so this is the 2nd crop from what are now 6-year vines. It's mica-schist with a loessy topsoil, unique among his vineyards. Another reason you should see it. This '13 is really nettly and pointed, with classic boxwood GV aromas; the palate is like an herb pesto of lovage, savory, arugula, tansy, cress and sprouts, yet the wine is graceful for all its spicy determination.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner "Privat," Senftenberger Pellingen, 6/750ml + (+)

AFN-239

There's more to this but it's harder to see, at least now. These wines need a few years to unfurl. The aromas are haunting, they pull you in, and there's just *more* to the palate, some coiled quivering thing waiting to rise and burst. I imagined streamers of tropical fruit, herb-butter, cucumber, rhubarb...

I honestly wonder if anyone could spend four or five days tasting Grüner Veltliners like these, and come back still insisting the variety is ancillary. Here I am excusing myself for offering five wines, but this wouldn't at all be absurd if the wines had the stature they *deserve*.

**CORE-LIST WINE.** This reminded me of Alzinger's amazing Federspiel from Dürnstein, but like that wine it revealed itself only with 2-3 minutes in the glass. It may have a tic less flesh than Leo's, but also a more chiseled precision. Every sweet green seems to be in it; herbs, but not "herbal," verbenas and balsam; Martin says wormwood. Fantastic pulverized-mineral mid-palate. It has a German-like acidity of 8.1 g/l, but many Trocken Germans are lower than this. Look, you're gonna breeze right through this at the tastings, but if you drank a glass I know categorically that by the second or third sip you'd be all "WTF???" This wine is nuts!

## 2013 Riesling Senftenberger Piri +

AFN-245

It's markedly rich this year, and I tried uselessly to resist it. In its mid-weight way it's an exegesis in Austrian Riesling; the sheer mineral beauty—and yes, the flavor of minerality can be and is beautiful—the saturated green density is like a leaf canopy. Look, I know that even if you're a Nigl fan, this is a step you'll skip when you're taking them two-at-a-time to reach the top, the Hochäcker and the Pellingen. But to me this is like skipping foreplay. Even more crucially, it's like relegating all those wonderful activities to some *mere* set of steps to be surmounted to get to the Destination. Think of a wine like this as kissing. And consider, sometimes it's just right, just enough, just *perfect*... just to kiss.

## 2013 Riesling Hochäcker, 6/750ml + + (+)

AFN-240

I had a feeling the fur would fly when we got to this wine. It has the kind of fragrance, you can't be sure you're not dreaming. White lilacs, quince, strawberry, ginger; the palate is the stuff of legend, a superb tactile mineral density below all that floral-herbal jazz, and the finish sets up base-camp on your palate.

## 2013 Riesling "Privat," Senftenberger Pellingen, 6/750ml + + +

AFN-241

Sometimes I think the portal to greatness is a kind of void. First they take away gravity, then they take your words, and when they've made you feel entirely helpless, then they let you in. Each time I drink a great wine I have the feeling "None of my tricks are any good here." All the little stuff we deploy to try and stay on top of life. In some sense we come to greatness naked, not because greatness "demands" it, but because that is its language.

None of the things we agree are exalted is easy. Love will kill us. Ecstasy flattens us afterwards. Greatness strips us down before it lets us in. These things are gorgeous and fierce, and sometimes we seek comfort in that which is pretty and reassuring, and where we maintain the fantasy of control.

With a great wine we begin by trying to write about it the way we do with all other wines; we show what we've seen by breaking it down. If we're delighted or amazed, we try to say why. The wine is an object we try to describe. With a great wine, our words are like tiny fists raining useless blows against a huge edifice of indifference. All we can hope to say is what it's like to be there. Then if you can, you say what the wine is like, in some new way, and your reader is sure you're unwell.

There are "easy" great wines. They overwhelm you but they're visible—incandescent, but visible. This Riesling isn't quite that kind of wine. It had the esoteric, exotic aromas I expected to encounter, but the palate was nearly incomprehensible. It alighted on each living thing in a kingdom of flowers, stone-fruits and herbs, releasing a massive sensual vinosity within which all of them are steeping. The wine was bigger than I was. I'll buy half bottles!

## 2013 Riesling Rehberger Goldberg + +

AFN-242

This is entirely different from Nigl's other Rieslings; it's all about caraway seeds, fennel, licorice; crackery but also a crunchy granular meringue with white raspberries and coconut, and mineralty you can scoop off your tongue with a table-crumber. It's like no other Riesling.

## Other Fun Stuff

### 2013 Gelber Muskateller

AFN-229

I wonder if this was influenced by the Müller-Catoir Martin told me he likes so much. It has a perfectly *precise* aroma, a keen tinglingly light body (11.5%), and it's delicate but far from demure; opal basil, and a silvery minerality that feints a little toward Riesling. A Muscat that aspires to class.

### 2013 Sauvignon Blanc

AFN-243

If you like a lot of SB fragrance this will curl your toes; purely varietal but with a sweet redcurranty spiciness that's just seductive; cool, generous, expressive but not gaudy, herbal but not "herbaceous."

### 2011 Brut de Brut (Sekt), 6/750ml

AFN-237

70% Chardonnay, 30% Grüner Veltliner. I swear he said he was discontinuing this, yet here it still is. 100% Chardonnay—I asked for "Blanc de Blancs" on the label. Zero dosage. Most of it is still *en tirage*, but I'm grabbing a bunch because it's so damn good; grown on limestone, it's a crackery and addictively gulpable fizz; not "simple," just straightforward and tasty.

### 2011 Brut de Brut Rosé (Sekt), 6/750ml + (+)

AFN-236

All 2010; moderate color of Coho salmon; super-attractive "cool" aromas, and a vividly bright, refreshing palate; perfect hot-weather fizz, sleek and snappy.

### 2013 Zweigelt Rosé

AFN-230

A fragrant gauzy wine that only seems slight; there's winery grip here. Still, this is one of the fresh ones, a warm-weather wine, but refined and silky.

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner Eiswein, 12/375ml +

AFN-244

Picked overnight Dec. 14-15 at about 150° Oechsle from entirely clean fruit under nets; the final wine has 9.5 g/l acidity and spent a year in barrel. From a gravelly site, it's a super-clear quintessence of GV in its vetiver-acacia profile, rather sweet, but admirable.



vineyard area // 80 hectares    annual production // 33,000 cases  
 certification // ISO 22000 Sustainable  
 top sites & soil types // Berg Vogelsang, Loiser Berg, Steinmassel (primary rock);  
 Käferberg (marine sediments on primary rock); Heiligenstein (Permian rock);  
 Lamm (Loam on Permian rock)  
 grape varieties // 38% Grüner Veltliner, 19% Riesling,  
 43% Pinot Noir, St. Laurent, Chardonnay and other varieties.

*I often talk about things like “class” and “timbre” when I write about Bründlmayer.*

*Class* is indefinable. It bears upon a certain simplicity, but it isn't simple. It feels effortless but it isn't. It's richly satisfying but it's hard to say why. It may seem to have little to do with the reasons you buy this wine and not the other one, or with what you choose to drink, but at last you stumble upon it and find you can't resist any more. Class will give you pleasure deeper than joy or amusement.

*Timbre* is the way an instrument sounds, or more accurately, the way a given player makes it sound. The great players seem to release an almost fluid sonorousness from an instrument. It purrs for them. I often receive this image spontaneously when I taste Willi's wines. And I think if you put these things together you arrive at elegance, which is another wine-word you can't deconstruct. When *you* taste them, you'll find you respond from the richest aspect of your temperament, or else you'll barely respond at all. These wines won't put on a show for you, but they will deliver a calm grace and a genial loveliness.

Though Bründlmayer is by far the largest estate I

represent—at a whopping 80 hectares, I find it lovely that we still taste in the cozy little tasting room. I'm sure there's somewhere in the vast Willi-nexus where delegations are entertained, but we still taste in this small room off the equally unassuming winery on a quiet Gasse in Langenlois. It's nice, and familiar.

I'm also impressed by Willi's decision to hold his biggest wines back from release until he feels they're more ready, a principled choice with financial consequences, that only a market “leader” could make. But our thoughtful and charming friend is deceptively mild in his social persona. Beneath the surface lies courage and a bedrock integrity.

Soils are rocky and dry in the hills, fertile and calcareous in the lower areas. That's according to Willi's estate brochure, from which I'll quote a little.

“All different wines are aged by the classical method in oak and acacia casks in deep vaulted cellars. In the vineyards the family apply organic principles

**Bründlmayer at a glance** // Generally considered Austria's best winery, based on steadily outstanding wines across the entire range. I'll confess it's gotten harder, not easier, to sum this up over the 20 years I've been visiting here. In recent vintages the texture of Willi's wines has changed. Lately they're showing the calm zen demeanor of Alzinger's wines. Perhaps less explicitly articulate, yet somehow more kind. I don't think it's on purpose, or at least, it may be a collateral effect of something else he set out to do. Willi is remarkably willing to let the wines control their own destinies. In many vintages, one or another of them will escape, such as the insanely peppery '09 Vogelsang GrüVe. I can hear him say “We don't seek to shape it; the wine follows its own preferences.” Willi refers to me as a “classicist,” because he notices how I wince at certain extremes, of alcohol perhaps, or botrytis. He in turn is admirably willing to love a wine even if it's what I might call ornery. His sparkling wine is the nearest thing to Champagne of anything that isn't Champagne, yet it doesn't imitate Champagne and only tastes a little like it. His reds are strikingly fragrant, but he seems to prefer them cool, sometimes to a point I perceive as stiff. But this is how he wishes them, lean and stretchy and sinewy. It is very good of him to tolerate my being selective among them. I'd call Willi's wines sophisticated and civilized, as long as you know these aren't euphemisms for diffidence. The best ones taste as though they were fond of you.

**how the wines taste** // The wines are quite unlike any wines I know, not in their actual flavors, but rather the way flavors are presented to the palate. They are, it might be said, the Stradivarius of wines, distinguishable (and made precious) by the beauty of their tones. Indeed, I always seem to think in sonorous terms for Willi's wines: “THE ACOUSTICS of the fruit are perfect,” I wrote at one point. You taste class immediately.

WEINGUT  
BRÜNDLMAYER

KELLER



(no chemical fertilizers, herbicides and chemical sprays).” Bründlmayer neither crushes nor pumps 90% of his musts; the other 10% is macerated overnight and crushed to emphasize varietality. Nor is this formulaic; it adapts from year to year.

Bründlmayer is universally revered and respected. Partly it’s the wines, of course, their outstanding success in a variety of idioms over so many years. It’s also because of Willi himself, who combines a piercing intellect with such halcyon demeanor you can’t help but be fond of him.

I also think Willi’s wines are changing somewhat from the time I first encountered them, or perhaps it is I who have changed. They are like an extremely good-looking woman (or man!) who wears very understated clothes. They are almost completely without affect, but with great candor and transparency. I also appreciate the willingness to risk, even when I’m unconvinced by the results. I’m sure Willi would say “It keeps things interesting.”

There are a lot of wines, but there are a lot of *back-*

*vintages*, which is exceedingly rare in Austria, and I join Willi in our quixotically doomed attempt to wean buyers away from latest-vintage mania.

I write about Willi, because we’re contemporaries, but mostly it’s his son Vincent who’s the face of the estate for you. (And what a face...) Vincent affords me the deference appropriate to a Great-Friend-O-Dad’s, not to mention a big-market importer, but sooner or later this will all be his, and we’ll see what that means. His own wine – the GV from Spiegel – is superb, and he has time to grow into the legacy.

It goes almost without saying how sublime the 2013s are here. Yet the most profound wine I tasted was a 2012, and the range of years on the table gave a reassuring context and sense of continuity. To be sure, 2013 is a lovely vintage, and it takes its place in the larger pattern, of many kinds of vintages, and the only way to glean the pattern is to stand back, until all this rushing toward the new begins to look a little too breathless.

## The Red Wines

### 2012 Zweigelt, 1.0 Liter

ABY-305L

All cool and violet, the silkiest and least gushy of all our red Liters, with Bründlmayer's refinement and all the judicial aloofness of his reds. Yet it's loveable, and you buy a lot of it.

### 2011 Zweigelt Reserve +

ABY-321

This wine is fantastic, effusive, sweet and almost creamy. It's for sure the rogue pup in the litter, but it's fun to see a Bründlmayer red this frisky and energetic.

### 2007 Pinot Noir "Cecile," 6/750ml

ABY-322

### 2011 Pinot Noir Reserve, 6/750ml

ABY-294

The '07 is marrowy and "Burgundian" and sandalwoody, with lovely PN sweetness; a grown-up wine with nothing to prove, just hale, friendly and reliable. The '11 is more seductive and curvaceous, full of silky polish and smoky length; the charmer and the crowd-pleaser.

*(Note to fans of the Cab Francs: the '04 is sold out, and both the '05 and '08s are still behind a tannic shroud, but I suspect we'll see them eventually.)*

## Bubbles!

### 2010 Sekt Brut, 6/750ml +

ABY-313

This will be the last of the vintage-dated Sekt in its current form. There are 100 cases left—which won't be enough—and the rest will be left *en tirage* to produce a "true" vintage wine a few years from now. It's classy and excellent, as usual but at its best. And the good news is, the new NV, disgorged 2/2014, won't miss a step.

### Sekt Extra Brut, 6/750ml

ABY-272

Disgorged 7/2013, and yes it's on the label. It's mostly 2010 with some '11, and as always snappy and biscuit, on the exotic "fruity" side. It isn't the same base with less dosage; it starts with a different cuvée, and its balance is perfect, and the tandem of the two is also perfect, showing how otiose are all the value judgments we make about RS.

### Sekt Brut Rosé

ABY-273

### Sekt Brut Rosé, 3/1500ml

ABY-273M

Disgorged 1/2014 and remarkably only 11.5% alc; the color is coral, not pink, and so it's a kind of "theory" of Rosé, fresh and rose-hippy, rather like a fuller-bodied cousin to Chiquet. Further proof you never know quite what to expect from this estate!

## The Parade of Veltliners

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner "Kamptaler Terrassen"

ABY-304

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Snappy, down the middle (and down the hatch), not as "sweet" as '09 nor as smoky as '10 nor as nettley as '11 or '12, but some of each of these things, with the buoyant windy lift of '13. Delightful wine, classic GV, textbook Bründlmayer.

**2013 Grüner Veltliner Berg Vogelsang, 12/375ml**

ABY-315H

As always this is about rock-dust and nettles, and this '13 is pungent, minerally, and markedly dry.

**2013 Grüner Veltliner Alte Reben, 6/750ml** + +

ABY-316

**2012 Grüner Veltliner Alte Reben, 6/750ml** + +

ABY-287

**2008 Grüner Veltliner Alte Reben, 6/750ml** +

ABY-317

You get to make a stylistic choice; the '08 is out of diapers, and it's all green beans and twigs, with the cool angularity of the vintage, and with a kind of power having little to do with strength but rather with a precise expressiveness.

The '12, which we only just offered a few months ago, is a slinky vinous bomb, all voodoo cajun mambo, a court-bouillon of lobster and peppers, the rowdiest of the trio. If your restaurant's noisy, take this one.

The '13 is overwhelmingly good, coming very close to Lamm; tensile yet dense, salty and long and penetrating; grilled pineapple and leather, cloves and crispy fish skin, with fantastic spiciness. It's in your face, not because it wants to fight, but because it wants to dance.

**2013 Grüner Veltliner "Vincent's" Spiegel, 6/750ml** + +

ABY-306

If I had to choose one GV from this portfolio to get all up in your shit with, saying "Really? You think this grape is just *trendy*?? You don't think it's important???" I'd reach for this one. It's doughy, mineral and powerful; amazingly high-toned for its mass; stony, but *smooth* stone, not gravel and not pulverized; toasty, mint and pink peppercorns; very Burgundian except again, *what* white Burgundy has this stony magnificence and huge solid core today? And which do you dare to lay down for thirty years??

**2008 Grüner Veltliner Ried Käferberg Reserve, 6/750ml** + +

ABY-318

I can't find where I've offered this wine before, yet I can't believe I wouldn't have, if I'd tasted it. Let me just say this: it's Chevalier-Montrachet with umlauts.

**2012 Grüner Veltliner Ried Lamm, 6/750ml** + +

ABY-288

First offering of one of Austria's iconic wines, the one they'd shoot into space to colonize other planets with. But it's a murmuring monster, so dense that it barely lets consciousness through; raw dough and rice-chex, power and magma; quite incipient but a kind of brown-bready obdurate mass is there. If you dare to drink it now, at least double-decant.

## Rieslings

**2013 Riesling "Kamptaler Terrassen"**

ABY-307

After an atypically stiff 2012, this '13 is back in its frisky form; total green fun; limey and charming; wintergreen, verbena; generous and graceful and with just the perfect fruit-richness to mitigate its green tartness.

**2013 Riesling Steinmassel** +

ABY-312

A cool, breezy vineyard on granite, mica-schist and amphibolite, it could stand as the "mineral" wine in any teacher's curriculum. Yet this '13 is markedly *juicy* and floral; iris, wisteria, and ground-up jewels; taut, focused, spicy, and with an angular mineral charm.

**2013 Riesling Zöbinger Heiligenstein** + ( + )  
**2008 Riesling Zöbinger Heiligenstein** +

ABY-309  
ABY-214

What a *perfect* time to reintroduce this lovely '08. And what a perfect foil it is to the masterly '13. The older wine is herbal and mineral, tansy and dill and romanescu. Back in '09 I described it as piquant, and having “moon fruit.”

The '13 is the first stirrings of profundity; lemon balm, laurel, balsam and aloe; mineral just pours through in a soaking stream, leaving an exceedingly fine-grained salty residue; the exotic sexy richness is coiled in its corner, visible and waiting.

**2013 Riesling Zöbinger Heiligenstein “Lyra,” 6/750ml** + +  
**2012 Riesling Zöbinger Heiligenstein “Lyra,” 6/750ml** + + +

ABY-320  
ABY-308

The wine is named for the Y-shaped trellising system that increases canopy, thus shading the grapes *and* increasing photosynthesis. It also “looks like the vine is throwing its arms up toward the sun,” says Willi (poetically!), who adds, “And it shows that you don’t need old vines to give great Riesling.”

I show you the '13 basically for-the-record, as it won't be released until 2015, not to mention any sensible person would jump on the grandiose 2012.

I'm starting to sense that Lyra is a music that's begun to write itself. Willi's early goal was to show the utmost rapture of fruit, as an alpha to the omega of the Alte Reben and its darker gravitas. But for the last three vintages, Lyra has become almost overwhelmingly beautiful. It isn't just fruit any more, and what began as a rapture has changed to a kind of apotheosis of fruit toward a gleaming and complicated divinity. The wine remains ecstatic, but these things are never earned easily.

'13 is graceful and massive, dense and weightless, a whirligig of complexity in which a hundred elements glide in an esoteric dance, moving quickly, stepping lightly; it has the focus and the beatific glow of Alzinger (and his wines!), somehow both serene and hyperactively intricate.

But '12 is something else again. It smells like the pears in the Garden Of Eden, or like a cool cream in which yellow rose-petals and vanilla bean have been steeped. Has there ever been a greater Lyra? Cool and infinite; a tight nucleus of mineral and Saturn-rings of fruits, flowers and herbs. It isn't overwhelming power—though power it has. It's an almost devastating beauty.

**2012 Zöbinger Heiligenstein Riesling Alte Reben, 6/750ml** + +

ABY-319

**First offering.** And an utter contrast to Lyra. This is all herbs and stones and hay, all in an ever-shifting mosaic; exceptionally pure, Gregorian, woodsy, even spicy and minty; it's Riesling asserting every one of its flavors that aren't flowers or fruits. I don't know what's on the far side of this, nor do I insist it's as sensually pleasurable as the Lyra, but I'm sure they only make complete sense as a *unit*, each fitting over the other's shadow like a palimpsest.

A short note to my somm friends. I know your wine programs are agents of hospitality first and foremost. They're not dissertations into the Very-Meaning-Of-Wine-Itself. Yet I also know that these two wines form a whole that's *enormously* greater than the sum of its parts, and that some of what prompts you to buy are cerebral or conceptual concerns. If you drink these two Rieslings together, a door is flung open and your knowledge of wine is catapulted forward as if you'd been shot from a trebuchet.

*The 2013 Alte Reben, by the way, is a strong candidate for + + +, but we should give it the year it needs.*

## One Final Outlier!

**2009 Grüner Veltliner Ried Lamm Auslese, 6/750ml** + +

ABY-324

What a fascinating wine! It's basically a Lamm with a huge discount, no perceptible botrytis and 20-some grams of RS. Originally considered a blending partner, Willi decided he loved it as it is, and it sure does smell like Lamm. It's meaty and robust, hardly sweet at all. A perfect GV when you have a little sweetness in the sauce of a big “company” meat dish.

# Schloss Gobelsburg

Kamptal // Gobelsburg

vineyard area // 49 hectares    annual production // 20,000 cases  
certification // ISO 22000 Sustainable  
top sites & soil types // **Steinsetz** (alpine gravel and löss); **Gaisberg**,  
**Renner** (primary rock with mica slate); **Grub** (löss); **Lamm** (calcareous loam);  
**Heiligenstein** (gneiss desert sandstone with volcanic particles)  
grape varieties // 55% **Grüner Veltliner**, 25% **Riesling**, 7% **Pinot Noir**,  
7% **St. Laurent**, 7% **Zweigelt**, 2% **Merlot**



*My co-winery of the vintage could have warranted that designation for any of the last several vintages, and I think it's time to say this is among the world's most compelling and consequential wine estates, and though I wouldn't say it's "the best" in Austria, I would say there are none better.*

I can't write this into a little capsule. It won't let itself be written that way. So again I beg your patience, and ask for 2-3 minutes to tell you a story I know you should hear.

Peter Schleimer and I were having dinner one night, and we ordered Gobelsburg's 2005 Grüner Veltliner "Tradition," and it was lovely, and got us talking.

Peter loves it too, as do many of his colleagues at VINARIA (the excellent wine magazine he heads up), and so we wondered why the idea hadn't seemed to spread to other estates. A few days later Johannes Hirsch was thinking out loud, wondering what it might be like to return to the old cellar instead of the brand-new one he built a few years ago, and there's a general sense somewhere between curiosity and yearning about the old ways—or the Old Ways—but best I can tell "Michi" Moosbrugger's the only man to actually make a wine along those lines. (Except of course for Nikolaihof, all of whose wines are this way.)

It's important to say the *Tradition* bottling is neither a pastiche nor even really a tribute. It arises from a wish to enter the spirit of the vintners of 100 years ago, before the possibilities of technology created choices they couldn't have imagined. What was their relationship to their land, to their grapes? And how did they conceive of wine?

"The prime motivator for these thoughts arose during the tasting of the old wines in the estate's cellar," Michi begins. Though this was done in order to determine what these old wines might be worth, the experience set a range of thoughts in motion. "Afterward I grew curious about the winemaking practices of the '50s and '60s, and spoke with Father Bertrand as well as the cellar master of those days. I felt that to understand those practices would help me better to understand what we're doing today." "I began to form the theory that, as more technological possibilities existed and were used, the wines became more uniform. The opposite possibility was also to be considered; less technology meant more variable wines. But these were just my starting-out hypotheses,

and I'm not at all certain absolute answers are to be found. I think in order to begin to understand the wines of the pre-technological era, you have to try and understand the ideas behind them.

"The purpose in those days was to "school" the wines, what the French still call *élevage*, to raise the wines, or bring them up. It thus followed that for each wine there was an Ideal, and the job of the cellar master was to realize these Ideals in the pure Platonic sense. Only when the Ideal is reached is the wine ready to be appreciated and sold. Naturally there was no recipe, but there was a sense of finding the proper moment in time and in the wine's natural oxidation, and these things were determined empirically and by feel. It's a highly dynamic system, with differences from cask to cask, vintage to vintage, grape to grape. Those people presumed that wine had to develop and expand in oxygen, entirely contrary to what we think today, that we have to protect it from oxygen at all costs."

But what is this Ideal? And is it something a *priori*, or is it of necessity limited by the contingencies of possibility? In order to go deeper into these questions, Michi set about to make a wine as it would have been made between the end of the Franco-Prussian war and the start of World War 1. The results are offered below.

It's quite different from drinking the normal GrüVe Renner—the Tradition comes from that vineyard. I adore the Renner; it's one of my favorite GrüVes, but in its modern way it seems to stride right at you, outstretched hand, big smile, saying "I'm having a great day; let me tell you why!"

But drinking the Tradition is like walking in your front door, and your beloved is listening to music, and she looks at you and you see she's been crying. She doesn't have to say a word. But something has happened, and it saturates the room, and then her, and then you.

The "story" of Michi and Gobelsburg has been told often enough by now, and besides it's almost twenty years



ago. Many of you have simply internalized that this is an Important Estate, and in a sense that will suffice. But there's a little more to say.

There's a diligence and a curiosity about Michi that I admire very much. His wines don't just happen. He has a guiding idea for all of them, and his approach is deeply craftsmanlike. He also seems to think in what I might call Monk-time (and I don't mean Thelonious, though that's in the mix also) in that his vision includes a tactile connection to the past and future, and he's not making "items" to obtain *this* score *this* year.

His "contemporary" wines are hued a little differently than those of Bründlmayer, the style to which he's most closely related. Both families of wines are detailed and pixilated, but Willi's are more silvery and Michi's are more color-saturated, and specifically more *green*. They radiate clarity, candor and vitality, and they'll flirt with you a little. The old-school wines—what I'd call the *ancient* wines—are not entirely under the control of their host. They began more redolent and studiously woodsy, but they've probed deeper layers of late, and I have the sense they are gradually unlocking mysteries so obscure that none of us knew they were there.

All of this is to say that I am *moved* by the sight of a serious conscientious man who is making the world more beautiful. It is always stirring to witness such care. And of course, the ordinary concerns of the world are duly dispatched, and we spend time talking about numbers and labels and the needs of the day. But I wonder, after I leave, what goes through Michi's mind about the wines. He tastes them all along with us. I taste and say what I have to say. I always drive away in a kind of thrill, and a little guilty; I alight upon a year's work like a migrating bird, I sit on my branch and sing and preen and then I fly

off again. He puts the bottles back in the fridge, he knows I loved them (I couldn't hide it even if I wanted to), and there it was: his work.

Gradually, one step at a time, Moosbrugger has added new categories of excellence to his roster, until it seems everything he touches blazes into brilliance. His sparkling wine is fabulous. His *reds*, from a region not known for great reds, are sensible and lovely. This doesn't result from any sort of alchemy, you know. It looks easy when you're sitting in the tasting room and the wines are so good you start taking their excellence for granted. But in fact it involves gradual and painstaking work you do when no one is watching. Choices of vine material and replanting when necessary. Re-design in the cellar—including an innovation so brilliant you can't believe no one thought of it before. Knowing that large cellars such as Gobelsburg's have varying temperature zones, and wanting to move wines among different zones without having to pump them, Michi invented a system of casks-on-wheeled-platforms, so that entire casks can be wheeled hither and yon.

Michi is aware of the gravity of a Great Tradition, but rather than weigh him down it seems to prod him on. If he is aware of occupying a place in history, I imagine it's to hope that, hundreds of years from now, someone will read a chronicle of Schloss Gobelsburg and cite his era as one of enlightenment. He is certainly an example of leaving the world better than you found it!

Feeling awed yet? That's not my intent. Michi's a rather quiet guy (as guys go) but he and Eva are actually Just Folks, and my visits here are warm and relaxed. In fact I've left a couple soul-prints at Schloss Gobelsburg. I was there with colleagues and customers on 9/11/01. And in a piece of eerie synchronicity, I was there on the very day we heard the news that Bin Laden had been killed.

## Red Wines

### 2011 Gobelsburger Zweigelt

AZZ-197

This “second label” permits purchased fruit and has some ramifications pertaining to the “DAC” business as well.

It’s a classic ’11, in a claret-y form, not dusty or aloof. Blackberries, berries in general; juicy and generous, long and sexy. More Provence than Bordeaux, actually.

### 2011 Pinot Noir Alte Haide

AZZ-215

This tasted like good commune Côte de Beaune, maybe an old-vines cuvée; still elegant but with a core of length; sweet jus, smoky, cardamom and sandalwood, and a sweet lick of fruit. Aged in 600-liter casks of local oak, 25% new. Pinot Noir was also brought here by the Cistercians—it is not an arriviste, nor is Michi trying to “do Burgundy.”

### 2011 St Laurent Ried Haidegrund +

AZZ-205

This is more buxom than the PN; it’s an overtly charming wine, one might say. Darker fruit, more vamping and seductive.

## Fiz-z-z-z-z

### Brut Reserve, N.V.

AZZ-070

Lot 1013 (pending actual disgorgement dates on the label) is mostly 2010 with some 2009, and 70% GV, 15% Riesling and 15% PN-St-L; as always it’s silky and a little “exotic” in an herbal direction; you’d drink the Bründlmayer with the schnitzel but this one with the salad.

### 2001 Brut “R.D.”

AZZ-217

Leave it to Michi! This is enormous fun. Disgorged in 2012, this is *wonderful* mature fizz; smoky like an old Blancs d’Aÿ. Remarkable how age bridges the distance and every other disparate aspect of Kamptal/Champagne to create this salty, estery and fennely being.

## Grüner Veltliners

### 2013 Gobelsburger Grüner Veltliner +

AZZ-206

One time I was tasting this with Michi, and I must have looked at him admonishingly, because he shrugged and said “I know, but this was the worst I could do.” You can’t sell this wine at this price; you’ll spoil everyone, I thought, as he read my mind.

These days I find myself thinking “Thank god I don’t have to *compete* against this...” because seriously? This is scary-good wine. It’s fresh and euphoric, with the lift and polish of ’13; clear, winsome, “sweet” fruit and a solid underpinning that isn’t precisely peppery, yet is focused and filigree for a loess wine.

## Grüner Veltliners (continued)

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Steinsetz + (+)

AZZ-211

2013 Grüner Veltliner Steinsetz, 12/375ml

AZZ-211H

**CORE-LIST WINE.** For many years this wine, from a plateau site on ancient Danube riverbed stones, showed the most esoterically spicy side of GV, as if it were fined with glacial dust and scree and stirred with a peppermint stick. In 2010 this began to change; perhaps, as Michi said, because the now 12-year old vines had sunk deep enough roots to locate their aquifer.

This is exotic, something between verbena and spearmint and quince. A pointed thrust followed by a big juicy robe of fruit, that billows in a foamy wave as it picks up oxygen, getting all barleyed and stock-y, and then suddenly minty and green again; ripe and grainy and vibrating with energy.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Renner + +

AZZ-219

The site lies at the foot of the Gaisberg, and contains eroded gneiss with a high proportion of paragneiss, mica and amphibolite, a perfect precondition for wines of minerality and generosity, just what this is.

And, always, the **best value in this portfolio**, because it costs about 25% less than its peers.

Steinsetz is licking at its heels of late, but Renner is just richer, less minty but more mineral; equally energetic but not so clamorous. Extroverted, angular, generous, smart.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Lamm, 6/750ml + + +

AZZ-220

*Lamm* as a rule is buckwheat-y, rusky, savory but not thick, like a vegetable-veal stock with barley, yet oddly also like lamb itself. (“Lamm” doesn’t mean *lamb*, but is rather a dialect word for “loam.”) It is a great wine though virtually without fruit per se. Its poise of gloss and power, intensity and outline, mass and transparency are emblems of the *paradox* without which no wine is truly great.

And the Chambertin of the Kamptal does not disappoint in 2013....

It’s a high-water mark of GV perfection, and even after all these supernal vintages, this wine can still gob-smack you. It’s every possible thing to cherish about GV, brilliance and intensity, taut yet endlessly juicy, “sweet” yet steely, like taking a huge cable and stretching it to the moon.

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner “Tradition,” 6/750ml + + +

AZZ-212

It smells like a sorghum brine, or like a beef consommé and then a giddy popping flourish of saffron; a total *thrall* of aroma, leading to perhaps the greatest GV I’ve ever had. I’d recently drunk the 2008, and was properly silenced by it, but this wine’s grown more intricate over the years. It’s so creamy, so musical, so grave yet so hopeful. It isn’t “sad;” it’s grave because life is serious. Stocks and gelées, spices and glazes, a kitchen full of stories, a home full of welcome, a respite of caring in the unquiet life.

I’ll try to say what I mean. Not long ago my wife was ill, and one night I was awake for a time, and I heard her lungs rattle as she breathed in her sleep. I felt first a tidal-surge of love—she’s sick and she’s so *little*, just one little human with her rattly lungs. And then I wanted to do something, to snuggle her, but I was afraid to wake her, she needed her sleep so much, so I lay there and my love had nowhere to go. It was just my useless love in the dark. And then of course I thought of the last time I’d snapped at her and all I felt was awful; doesn’t she have enough trouble without contending with bossy old me? Then I thought I’d apologize in the morning, but I knew I wouldn’t. These are starry thoughts you feel while you lay there in love and ashamed and think about your ruined kindness.

This wine doesn’t embody those feelings; it *addresses* them. It speaks to the you that is hidden away. What other things talk to us like that?

## Rieslings

### 2013 Gobelsburger Riesling +

AZZ-208

Greeny and grainy and slinky and juicy and herbal and dry.

### 2013 Riesling Gaisberg ++

AZZ-221

This normally somewhat aloof Riesling was unusually overt in 2013, from all of the three growers who supply it to me. This began somewhat lunar and still, at least at first, but the palate was white-flowery and salty and bordered on brash, and then the aromas brightened with air into freesia and peony, and that salty-herbal attack was anything *but* demure.

### 2013 Riesling Heiligenstein, 6/750ml +++

AZZ-222

I'd tasted at Alzinger this morning, and yet I wrote "This is the most sensually extravagant of all the great Rieslings tasted today," a day I wrote three plusses for an astonishing seven different wines. This masterpiece starts out deceptively gauzy, with notes of jasmine, white tea and cox-orange pippins, but then suddenly it is *insanely* intricate, almost incomprehensible; verbenas and aloe vera, chartreuse, lemon zest, semolina and ginger, and an astonishing finish you want to take home with you.

### 2012 Riesling "Tradition," 6/750ml + (+)

AZZ-213

This wine is writhing and spazzy, so jittery it isn't assimilating the calm of the cellar-regime. Let's watch where this goes. Already amazing, it's like blobs of paint hurled onto a canvas, waiting to turn into a picture.

## A Final Sweet Coda

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Eiswein, 12/375ml +

AZZ-223H

Actually picked in February 2014 from the Steinsetz; the sample was still fermenting but about to be stopped. It'll end up with circa 9% alc, and there's great promise of a varietally true wine that won't be treacly-sweet.

# Hiedler

Kamptal // Langenlois



vineyard area // 28 hectares  
annual production // 16,500 cases  
top sites & soil types // Thal (sandy löss and loam); Kittmannsberg, Spiegel (löss);  
Steinhaus (gneiss with amphibolite); Heiligenstein, Gaisberg (sandy weathered soils)  
grape varieties // 63% Grüner Veltliner, 15% Riesling, 6% Chardonnay,  
6% Weissburgunder / Pinot Blanc, 2% Sauvignon Blanc, 8% Zweigelt /  
Blauburgunder / St. Laurent / Sangiovese

*After all these properly modern scrupulously correct wines, welcome to the crazy-hippy world of Ludwig Hiedler.*



Though it wouldn't be right to suggest it's anything-goes at Hiedler; in fact the wines and the man are entirely disciplined *within the context* in which he prefers to operate. Which is different than the others. And when you hear about it you might expect the wines to be much more untamed and atavistic than in fact they are. In fact

what's striking here is how clear, refined and focused they are, while emphasizing a round rich vinosity in place of chiseled primary fruit.

(It also suggests we are sometimes perhaps too forgiving of the flaws in some "natural" wines, as Hiedler's are as "natural" as they come, and they are not flawed...)

**Hiedler at a glance** // Don't like squeaky-clean, reductive wines? Step right up! Amazing values for chewy, ample wines with old-fashioned meat on 'em. They are among the highlights in every vintage.

**how the wines taste** // Satisfying, is how they taste! Look, I adore those filigree delineated wines, you know I do, but after five days of tasting them it starts to feel like work. They demand study. With the first hit-o-Hiedler the palate sits up with a jolt: "Is there a party? Sure feels like it!" Yet within their succulent density is all the complexity you could wish for. They're the thinking-man's wine porno!

At some point with his wine in my glass I had a flickering thought that this was precisely the kind of wine I most loved to drink, and that most people ought to love to drink; vivid and forthright, frisky and yet with substance, solid and strong yet still drinkable. And not so digitally detailed that you feel you have to study its every nuance with each and every sip. There is something incredibly *hale* about Hiedler's wines. They seem to glow with health and vitality.

Things are astir at Weingut Hiedler, and in the loveliest possible way: They are slowing down.

The first organic experiments are happening, in the sites

Thal and Kittmannsberg. And for the past several years now Ludwig has done only spontaneous fermentations without enzymes or even SO<sub>2</sub>, and without temperature control. Part of this is Ludwig's innate restlessness, and another part is his desire to eschew the established orthodoxies.

"I am a restless spirit," said Ludwig Hiedler; "I always want another angle to improve the wines." Hiedler likes extract most of all. "It's the single most important facet of wine," he says. "That's why I don't believe in the whole-cluster pressing, because you lose too much extract."

"Plus," he added with a merry gleam, "I like to be different from the others!"

### 2013 Muscat Ottonel

AHL-199

A delicate (12% alc) charming Ottonel with full ripe fragrance and very good length; spicy but not catty; a civilized lady and a mouthful of lingering freshness and mineral nuance.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner "Löss" +

AHL-195

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Among the entry-level GVs this is becoming the most generous and full-bodied, and this '13 is the best I've ever offered. Rich, cereal-y and loessy, beautifully delineated fragrances, showing oolong, orchid and balsam notes; the palate is more peppers and nettles but still so playful, lively and animated; focused and classy.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Thal +

AHL-196

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner Thal +

AHL-186

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Both vintages are available; '12 being the rich, creamy exotic one, and '13 the refined and fiery one; burning leaves and charred peppers with oleander, acacia and tortilla. '12 is juicier, more lacquered and buxom. The vineyard is red sand and loess, the vines are old, and the wine is, for me, the calling-card of Hiedler, one-of-a-kind style, and a markedly excellent value.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Kittmannsberg

AHL-202

Available January 2015. Limestone-bearing loamy sandy silt is predestined for GV, but not just any GV—GV at its most "splendid," GV in the form of the Acropolis, and this Greek-God wine is like Delphic columns coated in cream. Toasted brioche aromas, with lime and lemon balm; lots of flowering-field and secret-sweetness but with a hungry bite of spiciness and a nettle-y finish.

### 2013 Riesling "Urgestein" (+)

AHL-197

**CORE-LIST WINE.** All the cool green things; woodruff, balsam, an amazing Chinese green tea called Tai Ping, lemon balm and a delicate mint; the palate is a bit ethereal but it's also just 4 weeks in bottle, and the finish is leafy and long.

If by any chance you wonder at the (large) number of **core-list wines** from Hiedler, it is by design. The wines are generous, with wrap-around flavors.

### 2013 Riesling Steinhaus +

AHL-201

The Austrian Riesling for lovers of *Scheurebe*. The site is steep with myriad little terraces, amphibolite and gneiss higher up and loess lower down. This '13 is X-TREME mineral, with juicy and tropical notes (papaya and soursop) leading to a vaporous minty finish. Ore and tat-soi emerge, but so much mineral in a wine with full malo—how does he even do it? You will not find a more original, compelling and delicious Riesling, like liquid cucumber and rock-dust.



**2013 Riesling Gaisberg, 6/750ml + +**

AHL-200

This is what Grand Cru means baby! Sporting 8 grams of acid and 8 g/l RS, it is immediately deep and gloriously saturated with terroir; oatmeal and jasmine and a fabulously salty juiciness; it's the Nahe-Riesling of the Kamptal.

**2013 Riesling Heiligenstein, 6/750ml + ( + )**

AHL-198

Subtly billowing yet hugely exotic fragrance, leads into a minty temperamental palate, with a vaporous length and a sense of *singe*, the edge of the wick, the tip of the joss stick; an amazing blueberry note; the whole thing is cool and coiled. Clearly superb, potentially magnificent.

vineyard area // 31 hectares  
annual production // 12,500 cases  
top sites // Kammerner Lamm, Zöbinger Gaisberg, Zöbinger Heiligenstein  
soil types // löss, eroded mica slate topped with brown soil, eroded primary rock  
with desert sands and volcanic particles  
grape varieties // 65% Grüner Veltliner, 35% Riesling



*In the top range of Kamptal producers, Hirsch is the moving target. The others are all pretty much settled in to their identities, even (or especially) Hiedler the outlier. Hirsch is the shape-shifter, and I think this arises from an aspect of his temperament whereby he refuses all rote and routine, and everything is challenged all the time.*

If you add the various issues pertaining to his conversion to bio-dynamism over the last six years, you get an estate where the wines really do almost “make themselves.”

The most dramatic examples of this were the two extraordinary vintages of single-vineyard Riesling that wouldn't ferment dry, and which were bottled as they were. These '07s and '08s are every bit the masterpieces I said they were—I have them in my cellar and they move me to my depths each time. Their celestial qualities, and Johannes' courage in letting them be, are why he was my winery of the vintage two years running. And yet opinions differed. My friend and former colleague Kevin Pike believed their existence sent a mixed message, (I don't know whether he actually liked the wines.) and created a discontinuity of identity that damaged the estate commercially. I'm such an idealist, I cannot fathom how wines as beautiful as those wines were could possibly damage anything. All they did was make my heart soar. Yet if people expect “a certain type of wine” from Austria, they must have it or they become bemused. In any case, the wines have since been predictably dry.

But Hirsch seems to eschew predictability almost as a statement of principle. His wines are lower in alcohol than other grower's wines, possibly because bio-dynamically grown grapes are often physiologically ripe with less potential alcohol than conventional grapes. But also because 'Hannes likes them that way. This means that a certain alcoholic torque may be noticeably absent, even

from his “big” wines. He also likes to leave them on their lees well into the following year. I suspect there's a sweet spot where lees and fruit combine perfectly, and if you miss it then your wine loses fruit which may or may not be recovered. “Losing fruit” isn't a categorical mishap, of course, but leesy wines are less direct.

Furthermore, Hirsch's admirable desire to maintain a simple portfolio—three GV's, three Rieslings—could possibly have precluded some of the micro focus possible with small-batch vinification. He's in the process of changing this, which I support and which makes him a little uneasy.

But there's something essentially thrilling about Hirsch. His rapier-sharp intelligence is bracing, and his willingness to challenge every shibboleth and truism is like breathing one's own true air.

Sometimes when you have your kids they lead you back to your soul, and the Johannes Hirsch I know now is rather different from the one I met ten years ago, still fun and witty, but entirely more probing and curious, even restless. He seems to want to go back and rethink choices that seemed simple when he made them the first time. He seems to want to decelerate in general. His wines, always exciting, are becoming profound.

An offering of Hirsch these days consists of whichever of the current vintage is ready to offer, plus anything still available and showing well from previous years. I like that it's not confined to “the latest vintage!” and that the wines have a chance to inhale and exhale. It respects them, and us.

**Hirsch at a glance** // Zoom! Went this agency, from out-of-nowhere to the top. Stellar-quality wines from a star-quality vintner at reasonable prices. AND AVAILABILITY IS GOOD.

**how the wines taste** // For such great wines these are comparatively “easy” to understand: they're juicy and spicy and their flavors are candid and animated. Specific nuances are, as always, determined by the vineyard.

**2013 Grüner Veltliner**

AWH-118

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Light, pretty, starchy; semolina and lentil, basmati; slight hints of zucchini and marjoram; cool and stylish. Among the “everyday” GV’s, this is the most savory, vinous and companionable.

**2013 Grüner Veltliner Heiligenstein +**

AWH-116

**2013 Grüner Veltliner Heiligenstein, 12/375ml +**

AWH-116H

As delicious as mid-weight GV can be, with a fine salty grip that’s *fun*, not strict; wet Wheaties and black salt; you go back a long way to find a vintage as good as this.

This “item” will undergo a change, as the name *Heiligenstein* in this instance is a general-site, not a single-site. It’s complicated and legalistic/bureaucratic, but ‘Hannes wants to be more careful to identify the wine’s actual origin(s)—the first effect of which you’ll see coming right up...

**2013 Grüner Veltliner Renner + (+)**

AWH-120

**2013 Grüner Veltliner Renner, 3/1500ml + (+)**

AWH-120M

I personally think this is a gala day for GrüVe. Everyone knew ‘Hannes had Renner—he has Grub also—but the wines were always blended away into the “Heiligenstein” and now at last he’s been prevailed upon to get specific all upside our heads. As if that weren’t enough, we now have a second source for Renner, alongside Gobelsburg’s, and can finally see what are its common denominators. Well *I’m* fascinated anyway.

So what *would* the wine be like spoken with a different voice? It’s mineral! Oleander and scree; salty grip focused to a keen point yet also wholly dispersed over the sides of the palate. Earthier and less hi-def than Gobelsburg’s; more rocks-and-twigs but also analog and warm.

**2013 Grüner Veltliner Lamm + (+)**

AWH-122

**2013 Grüner Veltliner Lamm, 12/375ml + (+)**

AWH-122H

**2013 Grüner Veltliner Lamm, 3/1500ml + (+)**

AWH-122M

A superb vintage of this! Bright, clear, spicy-minty and leesy; it recalls Bründlmayer in its deft balancing of weight, clarity and momentum. Power and snap. The second plus is only hedged pending bottling.

**2013 Riesling Zöbing +**

AWH-121

**CORE-LIST WINE.** Adorable, winsome and deliciously mineral. It has an allusive attack but a firm direct finale. Rock-powder texture and a fragrance reeking of irises.

**2013 Riesling Gaisberg + +**

AWH-123

**2013 Riesling Gaisberg, 12/375ml + +**

AWH-123H

**2013 Riesling Gaisberg, 3/1500ml + +**

AWH-123M

The first sniff of this encapsulates everything I mean by “Grand Cru” aromas, the erogenous sense of something unaccountable happening—*it feels good when you touch me there...*

The wine is surprisingly warm and creamy. This was the first wine tasted among the three Gaisbergs I offer, which turned out to be atypically overt in 2013. This is a blushing bride of iris and white tea, with a firm core of spice and menthol and an even firmer core of deep compact mineral.

**2013 Riesling Heiligenstein + (+)**

AWH-124

**2013 Riesling Heiligenstein, 3/1500ml + (+)**

AWH-124M

The true, single-site Heiligenstein is more scrutable than Gaisberg, which is usually not the case. It could stand to hold something in, actually, but what it conveys in its barbaric yawp is every giddy exotic fanfare of this singular and great Cru.

*Back-vintages still available: 2011 GV Lamm (seriously delicious right now), 2011 Riesling Gaisberg and 2011 Riesling Heiligenstein*

# Wachau

*I think my favorite thing of all about the Wachau is the idyllic Landhaus Bacher in Mautern, where I like to stay when I'm there. You feel very cared-for.*



The rooms are dear without being either stultifyingly luxurious or too adorably precious. The restaurant is just a perfect joy; lovely, radiant food, nothing show-offy, just purity, vitality. The amazing Johanna, who never seems to sleep, sets the tone for utterly exquisite service, and is somehow there the next morning to coax you into reluctant consciousness with her almost unbearable gaiety.

The restaurant's wine list is an Aladdin's cave of treasures from the Wachau and its neighbors. And yet, as I perused it night after night I found myself more drawn to the wines of the Kamptal and Kremstal, which simply offered more quality-per-Dollar than the magnificently unreasonable Wachau. Why magnificent? Because the region is stupendously beautiful and the best wines are the pinnacles of Austrian wines. Why unreasonable? Because there's too much business chasing too little truly great wine. The Wachau is a wonderful place to be a tourist, a gourmand, a wine-geek, but it's an awkward place to do business.

The greatest Wachau wine will distinguish itself from its neighbors in the Kamptal or Kremstal the way great Côte de Nuits does from Côte de Beaune; all things being equal, Wachau wines are simply weightier. The best of them, though, are distressingly scarce, and prone to be pricey, especially at lesser levels of ripeness. The great wines are worth whatever one can afford to pay for them, but the smaller wines often strike me as dubious values. And one must be quite selective. There's a large disparity between a few superb properties and the general run of rather ordinary vintners who seem content to coast in the slipstream of the region's renown.

Indeed this problem is getting worse, not better. Even if one yields the point that the best Wachau wines are the best Austrian wines of all, the second level of Wachau wines are nothing out of the ordinary and they're highly overpriced. I begin to wonder if Wachau wines don't really reach their sweet-spot of ripeness until the "Smaragd" level. Below 12.5% alcohol a great many taste malnourished and incomplete.

A subversive thought came to me. Since the problem with most Federspiels are that they're too flaccid and taste incomplete, and the concomitant problem with many Smaragds is that they're annoyingly overripe and brutishly heavy, *why separate them into two unsatisfactory categories*, but instead, why not just make one wine of say 13% alc instead of one with 12% and the other with 14.5%? You could average the price, and if you absolutely had to, you could make a few body-builder types just to appease your throbbing manhood. I say this semi-facetiously, but it's actually not a bad idea. Perhaps it could be applied only to the top Crus, and the lesser sites can go on making the lesser wines they're making now.

Not that any of this could ever happen, but I'm just the idiot to propose it! We can attack it just as soon as we've rid the world of "DAC."

The Danube cuts a gorge through a range of hills that can truly be called rugged. Vineyards are everywhere the sun shines, along valley floors on loamy sand soils, gradually sloping upward over löss deposits and finally climbing steep horizontal terraces of Urgestein once again, the primary rock soil containing gneiss, schist and granite, often ferrous (which may account for the "ore" thing I often use in tasting notes).

The locals talk of a "climate fiord" brought on by the gorge-like configuration of the landscape and the collision of two climactic phenomena; the Pannonian current from the east with the continental current from the west, all of which make for extreme variations of day and nighttime temperatures. The autumns, particularly, are clement and usually dry. Early November picking is routine. (Though one sly grower said: "There's nothing romantic about picking in November.") The western section of the regions is said to give its finest wines, due in part to cooler nighttime temperatures as the breezes blow down from the hills. The wines become fuller-bodied and more powerful as you move downstream, reaching their utmost force and expression in Loiben and Dürnstein.



vineyard area // 10 hectares  
annual production // 6,250 cases  
top sites & soil types // Mühlpoint (clay mixed with gneiss);  
Liebenberg (mica schist); Hollerin (gneiss mixed with löss and loam);  
Loibenberg, Steinertal (weathered gneiss)  
grape varieties // 55% Grüner Veltliner, 45% Riesling

*These were tasted on my second morning. All I'd tasted till then were Schwarzböck, Setzer and Hirsch, and while I'd started to sense 2013 was something special, I had no particular expectation today, other than being ready to be melted at Alzinger, as I always am.*

It was clear right away this vintage was unusually good, even by Alzinger's sublime standards. But by the end I wasn't sure what hit me, as I tried fruitlessly to stay a step ahead of the bliss of those Rieslings. That wouldn't be possible, and my notes got shorter as I sat there stunned and grateful. Not only is Alzinger the winery of the vintage, I wonder whether this isn't the greatest collection of wines I've ever tasted at one time in Austria.

But as always these are another kind of great wine, not the kind that pins you to the chair, nor the kind that pick you up and hurl you around, nor the kind that get in your face saying *Now see here!* while you succumb to their greatness. These wines are the purest kind of love and solace. One hears tales of a certain kind of hauteur among some of the Wachau's Great Names, but here there's only an unfussy friendliness. I'll tell you what I mean. Leo doesn't have a lot of wine to give us, though he's eking out a few dribs more each year, and we've at least graduated beyond the homeopathic. It's similar to Willi Schaefer. Yet Leo wants to come over to the States for our January DI-tasting tour, not because it will "increase his business"—it couldn't—but because he wants to be supportive, to meet you guys, and have a little fun. He'll invest time and money, plus be away from his family, just so he won't feel (or even appear to be) standoffish. It's just kindness, decency, and maybe a wee tip of the hat to my helpless love of his wines.

These are powerfully expressive yet mostly gentle

wines, the kind that you might believe can release oxytocin into your body, they deliver such affirming calm. I drank a bottle of F.X. Pichler's 2002 Steinertal Riesling one night, and it was as marvelous as I expected it to be. I've long admired the glossy power of those wines at their best. Yet when I looked at the words I was using to discuss it—it was showing well, it *performed* beautifully—I realize I felt like I was an *audience* for the wine, that I was separate from it in some crucial way. Perhaps this has everything to do with me, and it's by no means a slam on a highly laudable wine, but when I drink Alzinger's wine I have no such feeling. With them I feel included, roused, affectionate; I feel a thing akin to love.

Alzinger's wines are no more forceful than any of the other Wachau greats. They aren't longer, or riper. What they do is take the serenity with which they're endowed and pass it upward through a kind of apotheosis, beyond which they are beatific and glowing. You wouldn't be surprised if the cellar master were the Dalai Lama. Alzinger's wines almost never push and assert; they are instead amazingly sanguine and calmly lovely. Their force is a force of kindness. They take you in. They do not strut. Yet if you are tempted to think I'm offering an elegant rationale for less-than-stellar wine, you'd be wrong. The magazine *VINUM* recently published the results of a 10-year retrospective tasting of most of the Wachau's GrüVe monuments, FX Pichler Kellerberg, Knoll Schütt, Hirtzberger Honivogl—that crowd. You'll

**Alzinger at a glance** // Sleek, clear, winsome yet authoritative wines from the kindly hands of the newest Wachau superstar! Every vintage since 1995 is amongst the best collection in Austria.

**how the wines taste** // Alzinger's wines are uniformly threaded into skeins of nuance and even when they're at their biggest they're always shapely and lissome. They aren't delicious because they're great; they're great because they're delicious.



be interested to know Alzinger had the 2nd-highest composite score (90.7) which was .8 below the top.

The two top sites are among the greatest Grand Crus of the Wachau, and they are polar opposites in style. The **LOIBENBERG** is as mighty in the glass as it looks on the huge terraced hillside, and yet for a powerwine it isn't at all brutish. The wines, whether Riesling or GrüVe, are tropical and exotic, yet they manage an uncanny light-footedness and refinement. I suspect a synesthese would taste yellows and oranges in the wines. Loibenberg is a summer day with peaches ripening on the tree, but it's breezy and fresh, not sultry and thick.

**STEINERTAL** is the coolest among the Loiben Crus, both actually and metaphorically. It's small and hidden back—5.5 hectares, divided in three sections, with only four proprietors I know of (one of whom has Muskateller planted; someone get me *that* to taste), of whom Alzinger owns the largest share. It's more or less the first terraces you see if you're driving in from the east and the Kremstal; indeed it's sheltered by the craggy cliff of the Pfaffenberg. Steinertal makes *mark-ed* wine, "green" flavors, as

estoteric as Loibenberg but in another register of nuances; green teas, herbs, limes, heirloom apples, often a naked minerality. It seems predestined for Riesling, and even Alzinger's splendid GrüVe can be mistaken for Riesling (at least until you taste the actual Riesling alongside). You could construct a fanciful vision of Steinertal taking a trip to the Saar and returning with the thought "I want to make wines like those wines."

I'm remembering that Leo Jr. did a *stage* at Müller-Catoir with Hans-Günter Schwarz, and just as I thought "There's another angel," I found myself wondering about the various angels I've known among wine growers. I'm sure every other importer can bring such people to mind. My own heavenly host would certainly include Willi and Christoph Schaefer, Schwarz as mentioned, Hans Selbach perhaps above all, and Alzinger's father-& son. Me, I'm such a fussbudget I wonder at this sanguine temperament. It seems to combine a basic gratefulness with a certain imperturbability with a certain detachment from irritation, but really I cannot account for it.

OK, well, here goes. Don't say I didn't warn you.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Frauenweingarten Federspiel

ALA-134

Gorgeous delicate aromas, the adorable wet-cereal side of GV; classy and spicy with wonderful salty grip yet also a foamy juiciness; does this genre ever get prettier? This is *why* there is Federspiel, embodying every one of its positive virtues.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Mühlpoint Federspiel +

ALA-135

This is the hillside below Steinertal, where the slope moderates and you don't need terraces. The soil changes also, but whereas the wines used to be assertively green-beany, recent vintages have indicated a terroir gravitas that wasn't previously implied. Leo believes it's a question of vine-age and root depth, which makes sense.

Tasting this I wasn't sure how the Smaragd could be any better. There's a markedly strong fragrance, a lot of torque; round, juicy and beany, but also a big-boned peppery grip, like a Vulcan death-grip of pure strength; and there's that swollen delayed finish I remember from years ago. What could possibly be next?

**2013 Grüner Veltliner Mühlpoint Smaragd, 6/750ml + +**

ALA-136

Broader, more billowing aromas, pure sweet vetiver and flowering field; palate is both vaporous and taut, like a large building that hovers in the air over its foundation; really this is pure paradox, pithy mass enveloped in an ether of sweetness. It has the acoustics of a huge cathedral.

**2013 Grüner Veltliner Loibenberg Smaragd, 6/750ml + +**

ALA-137

A glowing exhale of fragrance; malt, apricot, iris, sweet straw; lots of direct peppery attack on the palate, the “dark” black peppers like Lumpong or Sarawak, all roiled tightly and hiding its cards; pepper and mint on the finale, but I’m sure this is only 60% of this wine.

**2013 Grüner Veltliner Steinertal Smaragd, 6/750ml + +**

ALA-138

This is a rare GV that leaves all utility and applicability behind. It doesn’t matter how you might “use” it, or what foods you drink it with. It’s an agent of divinity. The fragrance is sublime; kaffir and aloe; has the sense of sudden cold air when you cross a mountain stream; for all its acupuncture attack it’s also tender and allusive, compact yet it doesn’t let up. A low thrum of earthiness and a nascent mineral complexity, setting out on an intricate journey.

**2013 Riesling Dürnsteiner Federspiel +**

ALA-139

A soft-voiced murmur draws you into its cool green poetry; every sweet green leaf, like mid-winter spinach when it’s frost-bitten and the leaves are incredibly sweet; grows more expressive and determined as it sits in the glass; an exegesis of chlorophyll.

If you’re *evaluating* or “scoring” this wine, humor me a second. Pour it, taste it and score it, and leave the rest in the glass. Ten minutes later taste it and score it again. If you’re a 100-pointer I guarantee you’ll have five points more with that second sip.

**2013 Riesling Liebenberg Smaragd, 6/750ml + + (+)**

ALA-140

This is the best vintage ever bottled of this wine. Above the radish spring-onion aromas there’s a foam of buttermilk and quince; look, this is a dry Riesling *Ideal*, not to mention a paradigm of pure fascination; white tea, chalk, water chestnut, soursop, in a digital mille-feuille of mineral.

**2013 Riesling Hollerin Smaragd, 6/750ml + + +**

ALA-141

Elderflower, malt, peach, talc; an insanely and wrenchingly beautiful palate with *everything*, green leaves and herbs, balsam, stone-fruits and that mineral meringue; perfectly poised and blissfully synchronized in a wordless gliding dance, euphoric and quivering. Best vintage ever of this wine, an articulate divinity both glowing and thoughtful.

**2013 Riesling Höhereck Smaragd, 6/750ml + + +**

ALA-142

Leafy again, bouquet-garni and a kind of sweet smoke. Indeed this gives everything a person can ask from wine. Nor do the few mingy grams of RS hurt in any way. Energetic now, a bundle of passionate intricacy. Hollerin is divine; this is erotic, pulsing, addictive.

**2013 Riesling Loibenberg Smaragd, 6/750ml + + +**

ALA-143

It’s a profligacy of plusses. But this wine is terroir on peyote! Lost for words. Grandiose, profound, solid, massive yet transparent, silky. Tons of fruit yet not “fruity.” This is Greatness—a monument. A *tender* loving monument.

**2013 Riesling Steinertal Smaragd, 6/750ml + + +**

ALA-144

The most primordial among the smaragds. It’s the very perfection of its classic aromas. Direct, almost mordantly spicy. Wafts of green sweetness. Salty low notes. But we need to wait a year, and then approach with held breath.

# Nikolaihof-Wachau

Wachau // Mautern

vineyard area // 22 hectares    annual production // 8,300 cases  
certification // Demeter Certified Biodynamic  
top sites // Steiner Hund, Klausberg, Im Weingebirge, Vom Stein, Süßenberg  
soil types // primary rock topped with humus or gravel, and eroded primary rock  
grape varieties // 55% Riesling, 35% Grüner Veltliner, 10% Neuburger,  
Gelber Muskateller, Gewürztraminer, Frühroter Veltliner, Chardonnay



*We were sitting in a schmoozy kind of way with “Nikky” Saahs, and he was talking about the old days. Someone may have asked why the estate decided to go bio-d so long before anyone else did. Nikky told us that in the 60s his father didn’t use the prevailing chemical treatments because times weren’t good and he couldn’t afford them. So he did without, and his vineyards did without, and after a few years both man and vine alike learned how to do without.*

Some of you have seen the proud great linden that occupies the courtyard; it has become something of an emblem itself, that tree, yet at heart it’s also a kindly giver of shade and shelter from the rain, not to mention a home to a lot of birds. One can’t imagine Nikolaihof without that tree, yet one also can’t quite explain why it makes such sense. It seems to coalesce a lot of love into its nexus, that huge green being. The birds love it, the buzzing pollinators love it, any human being who gets near it loves it, and I think the tree also loves its life and being lovely and useful. In a sense it stands for our relationship to nature itself. There was a moment where their little wire-haired dachshund, charmingly known as “Lumpy,” was up on his tiny hind legs peering intently into the tree and barking, and Nikki explained “Sometimes when we throw his ball to him it gets caught up in the branches and eventually falls back down, and Lumpy thinks the tree is also playing with him.” Well *that* explains everything.

Maybe it’s because we know one another longer now, but I find myself wanting to remind you, as much as Nikolaihof is a Bastion-Of-The-Biodynamic, and as meaningful and stirring as the people and their wines are to me, as I draw closer I enjoy that these are really just people leading a particularly fine life.

And if you harbored any expectation the young generation would somehow “modernize” Nikolaihof, it was Nikky who insisted on reviving the use of the ginormous 18th-century wooden press, which had become a museum piece.

Once we were seated one year, I asked Christine, “When are you happiest in your work?” I thought the question was straightforward. Others to whom I’ve posed it have said things like I like it best in the vineyards, or I really enjoy the blending, it fascinates

me to taste so analytically, or things of that nature. Christine seemed quite undone by my innocuous-seeming query. “Oh I don’t know how to answer a question like that,” she said, and “No one has ever asked me that question.” She was so shy I was unbearably touched.

Finally she said she enjoyed the times when she felt useful because at such times she was aware of the gift given her—the power to be useful. Whether in the family or in the vineyards or the garden or in the restaurant they also run, she liked to feel she could put her providentially endowed power to good use. It suddenly struck me she embodies the Buddhist idea of enlightenment; to be cheerful and useful. It is certainly the least neurotic approach to one’s life!

Since everything is unified within these walls (and outside them also) it is very clear to me that Nikolaihof’s wines also embody that enlightenment. “Cheerful and useful” would be a perfect way to describe them. Even at their most profound, and they attain such profundity quite regularly, theirs is never an intimidating or haughty Greatness, but rather a sapid companionability that’s almost affectionate. The wines talk not only to your senses, they talk to your life.

Saahs’ preference for the bio-dynamic life doesn’t seem to hail from a concern we’d call “environmental” in the political sense. It rather arises from their overall approach to sharing life with other forms of life, and also from their sense of time.

Nikolaihof is the oldest winery in the Wachau; the buildings are soaked in history. The winery was the first Demeter-certified wine in the world. They have farmed and made wines organically for 40 years; for them it is vitally important to treat wine as a grocery first and foremost, as a comestible.



A study has been published which appears to prove the salubriousness of Biodynamic wines in general and Nikolaihof's wines in particular. Christine is very proud of this, and I'm happy for her. Yet somehow I'm less touched than she is, and I think I know why. I recall seeing a story in one of the magazines which said scientists had isolated the health-giving compounds in wine and could make them available in pill-form. At which point it became very clear to me; we don't drink wine because it is (merely) "healthy;" we drink it because, in an holistic way, it is good for us. Not only for our discrete bodies, but for our whole lives and souls. That wine is in fact harmless and probably even healthful is something we already knew intuitively; it's a bonus, but it ain't why. I am sure Christine knows this too.

It takes more people to farm organically; the Saahs employ 10 workers for 20 hectares. They claim a conventional winery could do the work with four or five. They are happy, they say, to give employment to more people; "We are not in this world just to make money," says Christine Saahs. Among the 20 hectares of land are two meadows allowed to grow wild. "We learned if we didn't control the vegetation in these meadows that the most predatory of the plants would eventually overcome the weaker plants, so each year we mow the meadow twice. It levels the playing field," she added, looking thoughtfully into the distance. "We don't drive a big car, we don't take world cruises... but we do mow

our meadows twice a year," she said, as if to herself. "We simply occupy this little form of skin and bones for a few years, but we need to nourish our hearts and souls by finding a home in our parts of the world and caring for this home."

Perhaps this simple rootedness appeals to something lonely in us Americans. We are such spiritual and emotional nomads. We seem hesitant to lay claim to this world, perhaps for fear of having to surrender to it. When I am with the Saahs' I always feel a jolt of recognition; this is the anchoring I seek, or imagine myself seeking. But could I live as they do? I don't know.

It's a shame that words like "sublime" can lose their music and force through squandering, and I know I'm part of the problem. But the quality of sublimity in Nikolaihof's wines has to do with their basic characters; hale, trustworthy, unaffected, substantive but never tiring, explicitly *connected* and charged with a gentle force. It isn't about making you love *them*; it's about what they can do to ease your way, by whispering their tender steady reminder of the sweet secrets of the world we share.

There's always a surprise during this visit, some wine or wines we didn't know about, and I've given up probing for information so I can just let myself be surprised. You'll see a few goodies coming up.

It's starting to be possible to talk about the "style" or the language of these wines. They are wines of

atmosphere, and some of that atmosphere is that of the cellar, its ambient aromas and also the environment of the casks. Nikolaihof's wines are (almost) never what we'd call woody, but the casks have perfumed their breath. In "normal" wines there is an explanation; in these wines there is a breathing. When I open a bottle at home, and I open a lot of them, I always feel, with the first whiff of aroma, that I'm opening the pages of a 19-century novel. Yes they smell like GV or Riesling or whatever, but they

also smell like food cooking and people laughing in the next room.

And, you know, the wines are good. I mean good by any objective measure. The recent round of reviews arrived as we were sitting there, including the triple-digit one, the first ever for an Austrian wine, and as far as I could observe Nikki and Christine were certainly *pleased*, but less puffed-up by their "achievement" than gratified that the reviewer took such pleasure in their wine.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner "Hefeabzug" +

ANK-137

**CORE-LIST WINE.** It means *sur lie*. It's exotic this year, but has the spicy flowery euphoria of '13 and its usual semolina-sweet lees; less starchy than usual but vastly more floral, as if a potion of wisteria were dissolved in it. Very long wintergreeny finish.

### 2013 Grüner Veltliner Im Weingebirge Federspiel + +

ANK-142

Well *this* is a miracle-wine. Sparrow energy; perfumed so pungently it's like smelling your irises and lilacs from *inside* the house; a delicate minerality, but this wreaks an utter havoc of charm and deliciousness, all with that delicate woody breath of the cellar. Numinously gentle, unforgettable wine.

### 2012 Grüner Veltliner Im Weingebirge Smaragd, 6/750ml +

ANK-143

Spices and tobacco; an old dialect not only of GV but of wine; a kind of melting exhalation of relaxing, nothing to prove, no point to make, just delicately forceful; at the edge of oxidation, but feels mysterious, not decadent. Banish the noise!

### 2006 Riesling Vom Stein Federspiel

ANK-067

Bottled in 2014. Pure quiet profundity here, in a markedly smoky form. Very dry, adamantly leathery, charred, nettle-y; firm and austere. But not meager nor remotely punishing – just not a "nice guy." I see it with a sorrel soup or something in an herb sauce with pea shoots, cressy micro-greens, yet there's also this lovely smell of old leather.

### 2013 Riesling Vom Stein Federspiel (+)

ANK-140

Smells like cookie dough! Also notably woody, and then the Riesling spice and brightness kicks in; verbena, shiso, bay leaf and an echo-note of marrowy cask. Has complete repose but isn't at all *slack*, and the finish peals and clings.

### 2011 Riesling Vom Stein Smaragd, 6/750ml + (+)

ANK-141

This is gorgeous. Fresh fruit but a cloistery silence around it. Hay and straw, the fresh profile only hinting at its murmur depths; a wine of the brightest morning, with decades ahead of it.

### 2010 Riesling Steiner Hund 'Reserve' 6/750ml + (+)

ANK-139

Among all the Rieslings I know, this one has the most esoteric mélange of herbs and minerals, like if you took a Geiger-counter to the soil programmed to register complex terroir, the damn machine would blow apart in your hands.

The '10 is curious and cunning. It has the oxidative note these have recently had, along with the firm smoky adamance of '10, and that chartreuse-y herbal thing and the arcane vineyard-geology thing, and '10's mulish length, getting almost fiercely spicy with five minutes in the glass.

## A Vertical Offering of Steiner Hund

### MV Riesling Steiner Hund, 6/750ml

ANK-144

There are five vintages in the mix—I don't know which will constitute the extra bottle in a case-of-6. The beautiful 2009 you remember from last year; fresh and pure mineral. 2008 is superb and complicated, with plenty of exotics and Chartreuse-y herbalness to counterpoint its jasmine and white chocolate *yang* side. 2007 smells like irises; it's in the typical trough of that vintage but is highly promising. 2004 is astonishing from a good bottle, +++ quality and the best-in-show. 2003 has darkened, but there's an attractive beeswax note and still some mineral. 2002, while also dark-colored, is a fine lovely "antique" Riesling.

### 1998 "Steinriesler," 6/750ml + + +

ANK-117

"Riesler" is an archaic term for Riesling. Saahs wanted to see how a wine might age in cask without sulfur if it were an ordinary and not a grand wine to begin with. The first example was a glorious 1999, offered two years ago. So what do they do for an encore?

Offer something even older.

This is a masterpiece of time, nature and instinct. Less "humble" than that '99 was, and more insanely, dauntingly complex. I could detail its three paragraphs worth of nuance if I had 40 minutes to study it. Let's just say, a perfect *positive* oxidation, a whole encyclopedia of wild flowers and herbs, a mélange of every possible salt, and the gentlest note of allspice and pink peppercorn.

I don't care what it costs—don't miss it.

### 2006 Riesling Vom Stein "Jungfernlese," 6/750ml + +

ANK-135

It means the virgin-vintage, the first crop from young vines. And it's what the Germans would call *Feinherb*, and it's what any sane person would call irresistible! A potion of iris and lavender, spicy and penetrating; very long, seductively earthy, like a really profound Nahe Spätlese, almost the 5-spice and wildflower of Dönnhoff's Felsenberg.

### 2006 Riesling "Baumpresse," 6/750ml + +

ANK-145

Expensive, yes, but it's a bottle of history, the reintroduction of the world's largest still-functioning wooden press. The wine, in fact Im Weingebirge Smaragd, is out of this world. A swollen extravagantly ripe Riesling, ripe in age and in body; massively juicy and vinous and stocky.

### 2013 Gelber Muskateller

ANK-136

After several years in which this was the class of my Austrian Muscats, the '13 was picked a bit too early for fear of rot setting in. So it's a small version, 10.5% alc. Snappy and almost steely, I want you to see it, but do know it won't have the dimensions of previous vintages.



In 1990 Hans Reisetbauer planted his first apple orchard of 1.5 hectares in Kirchdorfertgut and on September 16, 1994 Christian Carl of Göppingen built a still from plans designed by Hans himself. Quickly Hans gained notoriety in 1995 by winning “Schnapps of the year” at the Destillata specialist trade fair. Reisetbauer has been named “Master Distiller of the Year” by the Austrian gourmet guide A la Carte in '04, '07, '08 and '09. Most recently he won the Falstaff's “Spirits Trophy Award” in 2010.

Hans Reisetbauer's dedication in his orchards, detail in distillation and constant quest for new innovations has led him to be considered one of the finest producers of Eaux de Vie in the World. In order to control the quality of his products, Reisetbauer mostly uses fruit grown on his own property. Hans has also done careful comparisons to find the best water for use in his process, exclusively using spring water from Mühlviertel. As Hans explains, “Temperature, time and aeration during fermentation, as well as condition of raw material are important factors influencing the quality of the final product.” Following fermentation, the mash is distilled twice with the heads and tails being discarded. Only the “heart” of the distillate is kept as it contains the most prized volatile and aromatic components from the raw material and is responsible for creating distinctive aromas. Lastly, the product is diluted with water to bring it to 41% alcohol. Reisetbauer's Blue Gin follows the same detailed approach, utilizing a recipe of 27 botanicals from 10 different countries, and strictly Mulan variety wheat harvested from Upper Austria.

## Eaux de Vie

<b>Apple in Oak Barrel</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-024
<b>Apricot Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-003
<b>Plum Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-001
<b>Williams Pear Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-002
<b>Raspberry Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-009
<b>Cherry Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-004
<b>Wild Cherry Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-011
<b>Elderberry Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-005
<b>Rowanberry Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-006
<b>Ginger Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-014
<b>Carrot Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-013
<b>Hazelnut Eau de Vie</b> , 6/375ml	XHR-028

*(Eaux de Vie also available in 1.75L bottles)*

**Mixed Case Eau de Vie** XHR-010  
*Wooden case including 1 bottle of each: Apricot, Plum, Williams Pear, Raspberry, Wild Cherry and Rowanberry*

## Grain Spirits

<b>Whisky</b> , 6/750ml	XHR-015
<b>Blue Gin</b> , 6/750ml	XHR-025
<i>Blue Gin also available in 1.75L bottles</i>	

## Fruit Wine

**Brut Apfel (2009)** XHR-027  
*Sparkling Apple Cider, produced Méthode Champenoise, with 100% estate Jonagold apples.*

# Reference



## GRAPE VARIETIES

### Grüner Veltliner

Austria's signature variety—one in every three vines is GV—is a late-ripening thick-skinned grape. Vine material is important, and the new generation of vintners is gradually eliminating all the nasty old clones that were only bred for mega-yields.

GV will excel in every echelon; it makes a great quaff, a lovely medium-weight alfresco wine, and it makes superb powerful wines that stand easily with every great dry white in the world. Among them, it is the most flexible at the table, because it goes with things that defeat every other wine.

Brassicas? Check. Asparagus? No worries. Artichokes? Perfect match. Shrimp? You betcha. What about cabbages and things like that? If it stinks up your house when you cook it, GV is the wine to drink *with* it. Plus it goes with all the things other dry whites are used for. This is why I am about to say that GV should have pride of place on your wine lists.

As a rule it's a medium-to-full bodied wine. When grown in primary rock, these are common descriptors for it: pepper, boxwood, mustard-greens (arugula, mizuna, tatsoi, et.al.), "ore" (a ferrous sense), shoot-smoke, basils, cress, mints and parsleys, strawberry, tobacco, and ordinary apple and citrus. When grown in loess, then you find legumes, lentils, various kinds of beans, grain (barley, oats, maize), vetiver, sorrel, oleander, roasted bell-peppers, rhubarb. Seen naked on the page, you could look at these things and say *ewww, who'd want to drink that?* But when you taste, you know right away you're encountering something distinctive, original, and indispensable.

However "trendy" GrüVe may have been, its greatest value is it isn't merely trendy, but rather has a permanent place in the pantheon of important grapes, and a prominent place among food's best friends. Among the many wonderful things Grüner Veltliner is, it is above all THE wine that will partner all the foods you thought you'd *never* find a wine for.

One wishes to be indulgent of the caprices of attention in our ephemeral world. But at some point over the last two weeks, tasting yet another absolutely

supernal GrüVe, my blood commenced to simmerin'. Where dry white wine is concerned this variety should have pride of place on wine lists. There is simply NO other variety more flexible and none offering better value especially at the high end.

**Aging Grüner Veltliner:** you gotta be patient! I know of no variety other than Chenin Blanc (in the Loire, of course) which takes longer to taste *old*. All things being equal, Veltliner lasts longer than Riesling, and it never goes petroly. What it can do is to take on a dried-mushroom character that becomes almost meaty. Mature GrüVe has been a revelation to every taster I've seen. It's a perfect choice for a rich fatty meat course when you prefer to use white wine. Don't think you have to drink them young—though if you catch one at any age short of ten years you are drinking it young. Think of young GrüVe like fresh oyster mushrooms, and grownup GrüVe like dried shiitakes.

### Riesling

Riesling makes virtually every one of Austria's greatest dry white wines, which is to say many of the *world's* greatest dry whites. GrüVe comes close, but Riesling always stretches just that little bit higher. That's because Riesling is the best wine grape in the world, of either color. And because Riesling enjoys life in Austria.

Great Austrian Riesling is unique. Austrian growers won't plant it where it doesn't thrive. It's almost always grown in primary rock, a volcanic (metamorphic/ igneous) derivative you rarely see in similar form or concentration elsewhere in Europe. These soils contain schist (fractured granite), shirola (just checking you're actually paying attention), mica, silica, even weathered basalt and sandstone. Riesling's usually grown on terraces or other high ground.

It's about the **size** of Alsace wine, but with a flower all its own. And there's no minerality on the same **planet** as these wines. And there's sometimes such a complexity of tropical fruits you'd think you'd accidentally mixed Catoir with Boxler in your glass.

### Gelber Muskateller

Only in Austria (and Germany) are they required to distinguish between this, a.k.a. *Muscat a Petit Grains* or *Muscat Lunel* and its less refined but more perfumey cousin the Muscat Ottonel. Most Alsace "Muscat" blends the two, and usually Ottonel dominates.

"Yellow" Muscat has become trendy in Austria, much to my delight, because I dote on this variety. It ripens late and holds onto brisk acidity; it isn't easy to grow, but oh the results it gives! In good hands the wines are something like the keenest mountainstream Riesling you ever had from a glass stuffed with orange blossoms.

I'm offering every single one I could get my greedy hands on. Unscrew that cap, splash the greeny gurgle of wine into the nearest glass; sniff and salivate—drink and *be HAPPY*.

### Pinot Blanc

a.k.a. WEISSBURGUNDER. What used to be perhaps the world's best examples of this variety have seemingly succumbed to climate change. Many of the Serious Ones are now, to my taste, simply too alcoholic. That does leave the mid-range ones as very pure renditions of Pinot Blanc (without the blending in of Auxerrois, as is practiced in Alsace), and these often show fruit and shellfish notes I don't encounter elsewhere in the world. Yet as outstanding as the best wines can be, they face competition from the Germans and the Swiss, and even in Alsace there are a few growers who take the variety seriously.

## AUSTRIAN WINE LAWS

No great detail here, as this stuff bores me as much as it does you. The headline is, this is the toughest and most enlightened (or least *unenlightened*) wine law in the world, as it had to be in the slipstream of the glycol matter.

There's a discernable trend away from the whole ripeness-pyramid thing. Most growers don't seem to care whether it's a Kabinett or a Qualitätswein or whatever; they think in terms of regular and reserve, or they have an internal vineyard hierarchy. So I follow their lead. I am possibly a bit too casual about it all. But I don't care either. The dry wines are all below 9 grams per liter of residual sugar, so you can tell how ripe the wine is by its alcohol. If there's a vineyard-wine it's because the site gives special flavors. And old-vines cuvées are très chic.

Austrian labels have to indicate the wine's residual sugar. They're actually a bit off-the-deep-end on this issue. There's a grower in my portfolio almost all of whose wines have a little RS. This is deliberate. The wines are fabulously successful, and nobody finds them "sweet." But another wise sage voiced a note of caution. Other growers (said the voice) notice this man's success, and they imitate his style so they too can be successful. But they do a facile imitation of the most *superficial* aspect of the style, i.e. the few grams of residual sugar, and the next thing you know our Austrian wines are once again headed in the wrong direction. Don't get me wrong (he continued), I like the wines; they're not my style but they're good wines. But everyone doesn't have this man's talent. And so in a sense his wines are dangerous.

Such are the terms of the debate!

Here's my take on it. To focus on a vision of absolute purity as an Ideal will create unintended mischief. Will do and *has* done. Every grower's goal should be to produce the most delicious, harmonious and characterful wine he can. If that means zero sugar some years, 3 grams in others and 6 grams in others then that's what it means. "Oh but then we'd have to manipulate the wine," they retort. But this is fatuous. Winemaking is *ipso facto* manipulation. We are talking about degrees of manipulations, and which are acceptable under which



circumstances in the service of what. “We would prefer an unattractive wine than one which we have confected into attractiveness by manipulating its sugar” is a reasonable case to make, provided one has the courage to accept the consequences of making unattractive wines. What too many do, sadly, is to sell unattractiveness as virtuous, in a fine example of Orwellian doublespeak.

Remember, I’m not advocating the *addition* of flavor, but rather the preservation of flavor already there. A modicum of sweetness does not obtrude upon a wine’s character—it was in the grape, after all—provided the producer guarantees this with his palate. Most of us know how much is too much. So, while I respect the underlying scruple the growers espouse, they err in making this an ethical issue. It is instead either a pragmatic or an aesthetic issue, or both.

But maybe a little empathy is called for. I arrived right in the creative heat of the wine-renaissance in Austria, and am less sensitive to the dubious past that preceded it, but which the growers remember. After the War and into the ’70s Austrian wine was usually a pale imitation of German, but cheaper. Co-ops and *négociants* controlled the market, and integrity was an endangered species. Sweetness sold, especially when it was used to add a spurious prettiness to overcropped insipid wine. When Austrian growers experienced a rebirth of passion and idealism, they also wanted to distinguish themselves by breaking ways with the past, and so they favored *dry* wines with mass and vinosity. I do understand their wariness about residual sugar; the slope doesn’t look as slippery to me because I have never fallen down it. That said, enough time has passed that they can lay aside their fear, because the dogmatic opposition to homeopathic bits of RS is taking potential beauty away from their wines, and making them less flexible at the table.

## DAC

And just what does this acronym mean? It means “Don’t ask, Charlie,” because I’m not going to answer you. This may seem churlish, but I am truly annoyed. I published an article in *WORLD OF FINE WINE* that detailed why. Some growers agree with me, and I suspect others do but hesitate to speak out. So, in a nutshell, this is the pith of my dismay.

DAC, however laudable its aims (and to a certain extent they are), is essentially a bureaucratic and abstract construct, the results of which add *nothing* to the facts on the ground, only adding to the drinker’s burden, because now he needs to learn not only the facts, but the bureaucratic *system* of categorizing them. And if the DAC is modeled after appellation laws in France or Italy, one does well to ask how usefully *those* laws are working out.

They will say that every grown up wine culture has codified an appellation system in order to guarantee typicity, distinctiveness and integrity. They will say, as Austria strives to both emerge from an earlier era of

mediocrity and to join the mainstream of Fine European wines, it is time for an appellation system to be established.

I will reply, as we see how these systems ramify in practice, we also see the ways they can strait-jacket a wine culture, can inhibit visionary thinking and retard innovation. There is a constant ongoing tension between protecting that which has proven to be a region’s most profound mode of expression—such as Sangiovese in Brunello, for example—while also permitting a sense of questing and exploration. Sometimes it works very well, and sometimes it stifles people, and to the extent the laws are ignored, they become relics of irrelevance.

Why, then, would the Austrians willingly take that risk? What does it add? I think it appeals to their pride. And I think that the pride is justified; after all, what wine culture has accomplished what Austria has, in just the last 27 years?

But the DAC fixes something that isn’t broken, something that is actually vital and healthy, and the “cure” for the non-existent disease has serious risks of its own.

It attempts to codify the facts on the ground. Ask yourselves *why*. How is your world improved by codifying these things?

“The Kamptal is best known for its outstanding Grüner Veltliners and Rieslings, though other varieties do well there.” That’s what the books will tell you. *How is that not enough??*

And now? The “Kamptal DAC” permits only Grüner Veltliner and Riesling, insists the wines be dry, and insists on minimum alcohol levels. That’s a new bunch of stuff you, poor drinker, has to memorize, and which has added *nothing* at all useful for you. Indeed, if Hiedler could always sell his Sauvignon Blanc with “Kamptal” on the label, because that’s where it grew, then how is your life improved by his now having to *declassify* the Sauv-B to “Niederösterreich”—which you now must also learn the meaning of—because the variety isn’t approved for the Kamptal-DAC?

Learning the facts is enough. Having to learn how a bureaucrat or a marketing guy has catalogued the facts is a waste of your time.

To my justly proud Austrian friends: do not show your pride by clamoring to be included in an already existing system. Show it by saying “We have no need for the existing appellation systems or to imitate them here at home. We will instead evolve *new* systems that will preserve the gains we have made and will keep alive the spirit of adventure that make ours unique among Old-World wine cultures.”

So, I will not refer to “DAC” unless it is *the actual name of the wine*. Then we have to use it. But if it’s merely a useless appendix to an already complete name, we’re going to ignore it. Hiedler’s *Grüner Veltliner Thal* is not improved by being called *Grünern Veltliner Thal Kamptal DAC*.

# Core List Wines

## Hard Core List

2012 Wallner Blaufränkisch Eisenberg “DAC,” 20/375ml	AWL-013H	22
2012 Glatzer Pinot Noir	AGL-184	26
2008 Hofer St Laurent	AHF-065	31
2012 Setzer Zweigelt	ASZ-065	33
2013 Ecker Grüner Veltliner Steinberg	AEC-074	36
2009 Ecker St Laurent	AEC-059	37
2013 Berger Gelber Muskateller	ABG-136	42

## Core List

2012 Prieler Blaufränkisch Ried Johannishöhe	AEP-101	14
2013 Sattler St Laurent	AST-054	19
2013 Glatzer Grüner Veltliner	AGL-177	26
2013 Glatzer Zweigelt “Riedencuvée”	AGL-181	26
2013 Glatzer Blaufränkisch	AGL-187	26
2013 Hofer Grüner Veltliner Von den Rieden	AHF-062	31
2013 Ott Grüner Veltliner Am Berg	AOT-029	39
2013 Berger Grüner Veltliner Loessterassen	ABG-137	42
2013 Nigl Grüner Veltliner Freiheit	AFN-228	45
2013 Nigl Riesling Dornleiten	AFN-232	45
2013 Bründlmayer Grüner Veltliner “Kamptaler Terrassen”	ABY-304	50
2013 Schloss Gobelsburg Grüner Veltliner Steinsetz	AZZ-211	56
2013 Hiedler Grüner Veltliner “Löss”	AHL-195	59
2013 Hiedler Riesling “Urgestein”	AHL-197	59
2013 Hirsch Grüner Veltliner	AWH-118	62
2013 Hirsch Riesling Zöbing	AWH-121	62
2013 Nikolaihof Grüner Veltliner “Hefeabzug”	ANK-137	69



*If it's true that the road to excess leads to the palace of wisdom, Terry Theise has been there and back. A brief perusal of his writing makes it quickly apparent that the man has no reservations about conveying his thoughts and feelings on wine, life, sex, philosophy and general cosmology. In Terry's world, it's all interrelated. We encourage you to jump headlong into the wonderful world of Terry Theise Estate Selections. Prepare yourself for a psychotropic experience.*



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